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WHAT IF THEY DO MIND ?

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An Authorized Biography

I HOPE THEY WON'T MIND

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VICTORIAN PORTRAITS

Etc.



Photo

Douglas

PERCY COLSON

WHAT IF THEY DO MIND ?

By
PERCY COLSON

Illustrated

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To
MY FRIENDS
THE BROTHERS QUAGLINO
who have helped to make life agreeable
for me in these hard times

Heigh-ho ! sing heigh-ho ! unto the green holly ·
Most friendship is feigning, most living mere folly.
Then heigh-ho, the holly !
This life is most jolly.

—*As You Like It*

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What If They Do Mind?

CHAPTER I

ON BEING MALICIOUS

WHEN some four years ago, driven by the slump in American insecurities (in my case a wife), I was obliged to look about for some means of earning a more or less honest penny, I wrote a book of reminiscences, and modestly called it *I Hope They Won't Mind*. As a matter of fact, the only people who minded were those of my friends whom I omitted to mention in it.

The book—which nearly had the honour of being published by Mr. “Evelyn Graham” before his career as a publisher was terminated by an unsympathetic judge at the Old Bailey—did well. It made the placing of other books a fairly easy matter and brought me quite a lot of journalistic work. But, alas! in the process of learning to be a journalist I have to some extent lost that exquisite sensibility with regard to the feelings of others for which I was once so distinguished, and all I now hope is that *they* will buy as many copies of this book as they did of the former one—for I am as hard up ~~as~~ ^{as} ever!

I don't like writing. Indeed, I dislike work of any kind, and every morning find myself more and more in sympathy with the sentiments expressed by "The Shropshire Lad" when he said :

Yonder see the morning blink ;
The sun is up, and up must I,
To wash and dress and eat and drink
And look at things and talk and think
And work, and God knows why.

But if one must take to work late in life, there is something to be said for writing ; it is, at any rate, more amusing than devoting one's declining years to bridge and golf. In two or three of the reviews of *I Hope They Won't Mind* I was accused of being malicious. Perhaps I was, but the tag *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is apt, if too strictly observed, to cramp the style of the gossip writer, for it is a deplorable fact that reminiscences written in a truly Christian spirit do not sell. The famous diarists and letter-writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—who, even if they did not write for profit, must certainly have foreseen the eventual publication of their writings—quite understood this human failing. The *Letters of Madame*, of Horace Walpole, and the *Creevey Papers*, can hardly be called good-natured.

Lady Oxford, whose pen has lost none of its cunning, also understands it. With what feline skill

does she analyse and sum up Balfour, Rosebery, and the various other aspirants to the honour of becoming "Mr. Margot", whom she passed in review before, like King Cophetua, she spurned their broad acres and their glittering gold, and stooped to conquer plain "Mr. Asquith". And how bitter-sweet are her comments on Lady Frances Balfour and Mary Gladstone (afterwards Mrs. Drew), who wrote her "such unpleasant letters" that, as she tells us, "a woman less given than herself to turning the other cheek would never have spoken to them again". Lord Balfour, by the way, must have walked as delicately as Agag to avoid the snares set in his path by adoring spinsters and match-making mothers. Mary Gladstone, for instance,

. . . clung to hope when all
Well knew that there was none.

And it was not until she had nearly reached middle age that, clad in muslin and wreathed in daisies, she wedded the amiable—and reverend—Mr. Drew.

Being "hard up" is not the only reason that induces people to write their reminiscences. In many cases it is that curious phase of modern life the passion for publicity. Mr. Bernard Shaw would, I am convinced, far rather appear at Bow Street on a charge of having mistaken one of the benches in Hyde Park for the Board of Trade than be out of

the news for a few days. My publisher tells me that he is snowed under with books by elderly Service men and Government officials who have been for forty years or so on the permanent staff of the governor of some remote British possession. *With Gun and Rod in Tooting*, or *How I Shot My First Fox*. Then, too, there are the memoirs of nice old ladies and gentlemen who have been connected with the Court. We read of thrilling incidents such as : "One terribly wet and windy morning in March 1860, when I was in waiting at the Palace, I happened to meet dear Princess A. as I was crossing the corridor. 'What stormy weather, Lady Jane !' she remarked with her usual gracious smile. She was always *so* observant."

But after all said and done the "eternal lack of pence" is what causes most of us to take up our pens and write. This invasion of the journalistic world by the amateur is rather hard on the professional journalist. Editors of newspapers nowadays accept articles from well-known people far more readily than from men who have been professional writers all their lives. It is natural enough that the public should like to read what famous explorers, scientists, or actors have to say about their jobs, but it is difficult to understand how anyone can possibly be interested in the opinion of, let us say, Miss Tallulah Bankhead on birth control, or Mr. "Doug" Fairbanks on the Trinity.

Unpleasant as it is to be hard up, there never was a time when one could be poor with so good a grace as one can just now. Nearly all one's friends are in the same boat. I myself have never been really well off except during the fifteen years I lived in married strife, but all the same, I have managed somehow or other to see life from the stalls, and I don't like the pit. Thomas Burke draws a distinction between being poor and being hard up. "Have you ever," he once asked me, "worn a ready-made suit, or anxiously debated whether you should spend the sixpence you allow yourself for dinner on a meat pie or a sausage-and-mash? Have you ever walked anywhere because you hadn't the bus fare, or stood for hours in a queue at the gallery of a theatre after having saved up to pay the price of admission?" I never have, but poverty, to my mind, does not mean only squalor and privation. It consists in having to do without the more agreeable things in life—travelling, entertaining, buying books and pictures, and helping people.

The other day I was talking to the daughter of an old friend, a country parson, and we mingled our tears. "Daddy's 'living'," she said, "as with clerical humbug the Ecclesiastical Commissioners call it, brings him in about £300 a year, and with that and Mummy's £100 a year, he has to keep us all, make Dick [her brother] an allowance, pay the wages of two servants, keep the ramshackle old vicarage from fall-

ing to pieces, and entertain the fat Bishop when he comes to hold a Confirmation. Then, too, every old woman in the parish who falls ill has to be looked after and every young one who 'gets into trouble', as they call it when their figures get unfashionably big, expects us to smooth matters over and persuade the reluctant youth to lead her to the altar.

"And," she continued, "how would you like to take a mothers' meeting and talk to about a dozen fuggy mothers in the fuggy parish room on how to keep house for six people on thirty-five shillings a week? I shouldn't care to have to eat some of the nourishing meals one recommends for their wretched families. Here's a nice little luncheon dish," she said, fishing out of her bag a little book entitled *Cooking for the Poor*. 'Cut up the scrag end of a neck of mutton and boil it with two large sliced turnips, potatoes, carrots, pieces of stale bread, and a pound of broad beans. This is very filling.' And this: 'To make a nourishing soup, take the liquor the scrag end was boiled in and add the peelings of the potatoes, some onions, crusts of bread and a large cabbage. Flavour with pepper and salt. This, with economy, should supply soup for six children for a week.' "

Poor brats! I should think that they would never want to look at a plate of soup again. And some of them become footmen and have to hand caviar, quails, and champagne to the rich! No wonder they

turn Socialists. Once at a country house at which I was week-ending I asked the intelligent young footman who was looking after me what he thought of us all. Not much, I fear. "When I am handing soup to one of them old 'ags covered with diamonds and 'er ugly face all painted up, I long to pour it over 'er," he told me. If ever he does, may I be there to see ! Just imagine the sensation it would cause if some dignified dowager suddenly felt a stream of turtle soup in spate rushing gaily down her back !

The catchword "economy" has been a godsend to certain people who, though not obliged even now to practise it, have a constitutional dislike to spending their money. One rich man I know has taken to giving his guests beer instead of wine, and requests them to bring their own cigarettes. "I can't think *how* to cut down expenses apart from cutting down the servants' wages," a woman who is extremely well off said to me the other day. "We can't manage with less than three cars, as we all want to go to different places at the same time."

Another very well-known woman who gave a luncheon on Armistice Day was inspired with the ghastly idea of serving Empire wine—perhaps from sentimental patriotism rather than from meanness. Unfortunately, most of her guests were habitual "diners-out", and the experiment was not a success. One sip, and "suddenly there came a silence", as the

English translation of the "Toreador Song" says. A silence more portentous than the two minutes' silence that had preceded the function, and one in which regret for the fallen was tempered with envy at their lucky escape. I do not think that the lady will be able to get rid of her stock of Empire wine very easily. At any rate, not on the same friends: they won't give her the chance.

I have, thank goodness, one friend who firmly refuses to mortify the flesh and continues to indulge his wicked preference for French food and wine and expensive cigars. He clings to the fashion of the 40's and keeps a little flat in Paris, and in that little flat *une jeune personne* of considerable charms. When I tell him that even if he refuses to "Buy British" he ought, at any rate, to *lie* British, he shrugs his shoulders and remarks, "Tush!"

Much as I dislike economy, I would rather be hard up than live the lives lived by some very rich men, especially big business-men. Dr. Inge said the other day: "When we reflect that man is indolent, that his natural desires are easily satisfied, and that unremitting attention to money-making disqualifies its votaries from enjoying all the things that money can buy—not to think of the finer pleasures of life—it must be clear that nothing but a queer sort of religious self-mortification could induce many persons to choose the life which the successful businessman has to lead."

He is right. That much-envied individual the American millionaire works like a slave, and what does he himself get out of it? Never having had the time to cultivate the art of living graciously, when—at about sixty perhaps—he retires, he is hopelessly bored. The average specimen takes either to golf or to drink—generally the latter, while the more intelligent lets Lord Duveen of Millbank collect pictures for him. I wonder, by the way, if it occurred to his lordship on choosing his title that “Millbank” was a prison until about the middle of last century.

I was once, when in New York, invited to dine with the late Mrs. Fred Vanderbilt. Of the men present I was, with the exception of the late Marquis de Villalobar, who was then Spanish Minister at Washington, the only one who was not a millionaire many times over. Mrs. Vanderbilt did not, I believe, receive any of her own countrymen who possessed a fortune of less than fifty million dollars. When the women retired, I found myself next to the late Mr. Harriman, known as the “Railway King”. After yawning several times he turned to me, saying: “I expect you find me very dull, but the truth is I am dead beat. I was in my office down-town before eight this morning. I had no time to lunch, and got home only just in time to dress and come here.”

“Why on earth do you work like that? They tell

me you are very well off," I said. He laughed, and answered :

"Well, yes, I suppose I am ; but I can't stop. I have been working twelve hours a day since I was fourteen, and I expect I shall go on till I drop."

He did. About a fortnight later he had a stroke in his box at the Metropolitan Opera House, and died without recovering consciousness. His death reminded me of the last line of Baudelaire's poem on the death of a young girl :

Elle est morte, et elle n'a jamais vécu.

Mrs. Vanderbilt was very much burdened with the sense of her own importance ; to dine with her was rather like dining with Royalty. Apropos of Royalty, there is an amusing story told of the Prince of Wales, who has inherited King Edward's sense of humour and dislikes intensely a stiff, formal atmosphere. Seated beside him at a big public dinner was an archbishop who, while condescending to men of low estate, yields to no proud prelate of medieval times in an awareness of his own dignity.

"Phew !" exclaimed the Prince when His Grace had begged leave to withdraw. "Now I know what it feels like to dine with Royalty."

Although it is only recently that I have followed the bad example of so many of my friends and gone in for the concocting of books, writing has always been more or less natural to me. Had I lived in the

eighteenth century I should probably have delighted in writing those interminable letters that people wrote one another in those leisurely days. Neither Horace Walpole nor Madame du Deffand would have had much use for the single sheets of note-paper used by us semi-literate moderns. I like Madame du Deffand ; her elegant cynicism and her supreme indifference to everything and everybody outside her own circle always charm me. And how sporting of her to fall in love when blind and over seventy ; with Horace Walpole too !

Then there are the delightful *Letters of Madame* which throw such a lurid light on a certain phase of French and English society at the end of the seventeenth century. Her anecdote about King William III and the creation of the Albemarle earldom is somewhat startling !

Perhaps of all the famous English letter-writers, Fanny Burney in *Evelina* comes nearest to the spirit of today. I like her account of her visit to the drapers.

“What diverted me most”, she says, “was that we were more frequently served by men than by women ; and such men ! So finical, so affected ! They seemed to understand every part of a woman’s dress better than we do ourselves, and they recommended caps and ribbons with an air of so much importance that I wished to ask them how long they had left off wearing them.”

As an example of polite letter-writing in a lowlier sphere, nothing could well be more cautious and

practical than a letter which was once shown to my mother by a pious housemaid who, torn betwixt maidenly modesty and a desire to take the walking exercise suggested, wished to know how she should answer it. It ran thus :

Honoured Miss,

I have kept an eye on you in Church for the last few weeks, and if so be as you've got no objection, I should like to meet you next Sunday night after Service, to walk out together, with a view to keeping company if mutually agreeable. Hoping this finds you quite well as it leaves me at present.

Yours truly . . .

What wistful memories of a day that is dead are awakened by that letter !



CHAPTER II

MAKING ENDS MEET

I WONDER how many of those who envy the lives of people whose doings they see chronicled in the society columns of the popular Press have any idea how heavy taxation, death duties, and the expenses of modern life are changing social conditions. Neither the power nor the money is any longer in the hands of the old aristocracy and the landed county families. Anyone curious enough to study the school registers of Eton or Harrow for 1933 would be surprised to discover how large is the proportion of boys whose fathers have made their own way in life. An equally large proportion, too, are being kept there at a sacrifice, and will have to earn their living as soon as they leave school.

The great country houses are either changing hands or being converted into schools or public institutions, and the land is let or—if not too far from London—sold for building purposes. Some have been turned into hotels. “Great Fosters”, the lovely Elizabethan house which was once the seat of Gerald Montagu, was one for some time. One of its chief

attractions was the famous bed in which Queen Elizabeth slept. They charged ten guineas for the privilege of sleeping in it, and the proprietor found that Americans were quite ready to pay that sum. As one American lady said : "It is worth the money to establish contact with Royalty, even after so considerable a lapse of time."

The famous town houses—Grosvenor House, Stafford House, Dorchester House, Lansdowne House, Spencer House, whose late owners kept them up in so stately a manner, are gone. Lord Ellesmere still owns Bridgewater House, but no longer entertains there on a big scale. Take a walk round Mayfair, and, even in the season, you will find that most of the houses are either closed or their owners are using a few rooms only. There are no gay window-boxes, and at the "Running Footman" in Charles Street you will now find no menservants with powdered hair and knee-breeches.

The young, of course, have been born to these changed conditions, but they make life rather difficult for the older generation, especially for the land-owner class, who are most of them hard put to it to make both ends meet. The old type of country gentleman is fast disappearing, which is a pity, for he deserved well of his country. He was not particularly intelligent, he lived for sport, and in his heart was convinced that musicians, artists, and "writing chaps"

are not quite gentlemen. But he took his responsibilities seriously and he stood for a certain stable and gracious existence which, with him, is becoming a thing of the past.

He and his like have nothing in common with that small, noisy, and self-advertising set whose silly and futile doings are chronicled in the more vulgar papers—the so-called smart bohemian set, consisting of playwrights, painters, actors, and actresses who happen to be the fashion, film stars, and perverts. They give one another parties at which everyone drinks too much, call one another by their Christian names, and fancy they are having a wonderful time. “*Così è si vi pare*” !* And as this sort of life is expensive, those of them who cannot stand the racket set up as beauty specialists, dressmakers, or antique-dealers. And they are all convinced that they have a genius for interior decorating, quite oblivious of the fact that even in the rare cases where the natural taste is first-rate, the profession of a decorator requires long training and expert knowledge of art. There ought to be a new commandment: “Thou shalt not decorate thy neighbour’s house.” These amateur enterprises are seldom very successful; the social tribute is paid; their friends go to them once and try to get out of it as cheaply as possible, and after a year or two up go the shutters.

* “That’s true if you think so.” (Pirandello.)

Although, in principle, people have a right to do what they like with their own property, it is, I think, high time that a law was passed to prevent famous pictures and unique silver and furniture leaving the country. In Italy all works of art fine enough to be considered of national importance are catalogued and are not allowed to be sold ; others, of less value, may be sold subject to a very high tax which goes to the upkeep of the national art treasures. It seems, perhaps, hard that people who are financially embarrassed and who possess family treasures which they could turn into money should not be allowed to do so, but if our works of art had continued to leave the country at the rate they were doing until business slumped in America, we should in a few years have had nothing left outside the picture galleries and museums.

The owners of pictures are very often terribly "done" by the dealers. Judging by what one of my friends, a famous picture expert, tells me about the fraternity, horse dealers must be choirboys compared with them. One of his stories concerned a very well-known dealer who sold a picture to a client for £3000. Shortly afterwards the purchaser showed it to a foreign expert, who at once pronounced it a fake. He returned it to the dealer with a letter asking for an interview. An appointment was made for a week ahead, and in the meantime the dealer



MISS LEE

by Raeburn

[In the collection of Miss Mackenzie of Foveran]

managed to interest another client in the picture, saying that he was trying to induce the owner to part with it. When the previous client arrived, he received him most warmly and said : "While I do not for a moment admit that the picture is not genuine, I shall not, of course, dream of holding you to your bargain. Here is my cheque for £3000. Would you mind signing this receipt for £5000?" Glad to get his money back, the client signed, and the dealer promptly sold the picture to client number two for £6000, saying : "I have managed to buy it for you : here is the owner's receipt for the £5000 I paid him."

He told me another story about an Italian picture which a certain peer sold to a dealer for £4000, receiving a post-dated cheque in payment. The day before it was due the dealer wired its late owner saying : *Cheque stopped, picture fake*. The owner called in an expert, who said it was perfectly genuine, and his opinion was confirmed by other experts. Notwithstanding this, the dealer had it X-rayed, and the X-ray photograph showed that the head had originally been drawn in a different position, a fact which proved nothing, as it is well known that painters—especially the painter in question—frequently made such alterations. The owner of the picture refused to fight the case and took the picture back. Now, the reason for all this was simply that the

dealer had bought the picture for an American client who changed his mind before the transaction was closed. It was subsequently sold for £10,000.

Dealers sometimes get caught in their own toils. I heard of one who had put a picture aside for his chief patron, an American multi-millionaire of great social importance, while he was making up his mind whether to buy it or not. The price was \$75,000. In the meantime another client saw it, fell in love with it and offered to buy it on the spot and take it away with him. Thinking a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush, the dealer sold it to him for \$100,000. The next day the client for whom he had agreed to reserve it called and said he had decided to buy it. Furious at finding his picture gone, he told the dealer that if he did not get it back for him, *and* at the price agreed, he would not only lose him as a client, but that he would ruin him as a dealer. The buyer of the picture got wind of what had happened and ran the price up to \$400,000 before he would part with it. The dealer had to pay.

Here is the correct version of a story which has been told in various forms. A well-known London dealer bought for a small sum a picture which, he was convinced, was a genuine Titian. He employed a picture faker to paint a modernist landscape over it and took it to New York, paying duty on it as such. He then placed it in the hands of a famous restorer

to have the landscape removed. A month later the restorer wrote to him saying :

I have removed the landscape and your Titian. What do you want me to do with the Coronation of George IV which I found underneath it?

The fluctuations in the price the owner of a picture gets for it and that for which it is eventually sold to the millionaire client are very considerable. Let us say that Lord A., worried to death by taxation, decides that he must part with the portrait of his great-grandmother by Reynolds. He writes to a world-famous dealer saying :

I hear that they are paying high prices in America for English portraits. I should like you to see Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait of my great-grandmother, of which I am reluctantly obliged to dispose. It has been hanging in the dining-room of my country place ever since Sir Joshua painted it.

The dealer, very much a man of the world, motors down to his lordship's country seat, lunches and makes himself extremely agreeable. He looks at the picture and says, "Yes, undoubtedly a Reynolds, but unfortunately not in his best manner." He goes on to say that he has, at the moment, three or four

Reynolds ; that, in fact, there is rather a slump in great-grandmothers, and that he is afraid he will be unable to buy it. "However," he says, "if you will take a really reasonable price for it, I think I know a dealer who is looking for a portrait of that type. Shall I send him down to have a look at it?" Lord A., desperately in need of money, agrees, the dealer in question arrives, politely disparages the picture, makes as low an offer for it as he thinks is likely to be accepted, and generally drives off with his bargain. Needless to say, he is merely working for the big man, who gives him a handsome commission and after a few months sells it in New York for an enormous price.

By the way, if you ever buy a picture in Italy, be careful to declare exactly what you pay for it, unless you can manage to get it out of the country by one of the various dodges known only to picture dealers. The Italian Government has the right to buy at the price declared, any work of art that has been purchased in the country. I was told a harrowing story of their methods by an American lady whom I met at Salsomaggiore a few years ago. Her husband had bought a charming Sieneese picture for which he had paid about £2,250. He afterwards went back to America, leaving it with her and telling her to be sure, when she left Italy, to declare the sum that he had given for it, in order to avoid complications.

Instead of doing so, she simply showed the picture to the very polite official at the "Brera" in Milan, and asked him what the duty amounted to. "A very charming picture," said he. "May I ask how much you paid for it?" "I hardly know," she replied. "My husband bought it." "Do you think it is worth 500 *lire*?" he asked her. "Yes," she said. "I certainly think my husband paid at least that amount for it." "Well, shall we put down its value at that sum?"

Highly delighted at getting off, as she imagined would be the case, by paying duty on 500 *lire*, she agreed and signed the paper he gave her declaring its value at 500 *lire*. She was told to leave it with him for the completion of the formalities, and was bowed out with the usual Italian politeness. Alas! a day or two later she received a letter saying that, acting in accordance with its right, the Government proposed buying her picture at its declared value, and enclosing a cheque for 500 *lire*! She had no remedy.

In fairness to professional dealers in pictures and antiques, one must admit that they have not the monopoly of dishonesty. There are many people of good position with country houses who are only too willing to allow the dealer to plant pictures and furniture on them and go fifty-fifty in the profits on sales. He then tells an American client that Lady So-and-so has a fine Romney or some wonderful

Chippendale chairs ; old family possessions which he thinks he can persuade her to sell. In nine cases out of ten the deal comes off, and the objects sold are replaced by others.

A few years ago the owner of one of the finest houses in Mayfair sold it at a very handsome price. Now, the morning-room was papered with one of those delightful eighteenth-century wallpapers in the Chinese manner which are so prized by collectors. One day, when all the negotiations had been completed and the price paid, the purchaser made an unexpected and very early visit to her new house and discovered its former owner busily engaged with a workman in stripping the paper off the walls. The scene between the two ladies may be imagined !

At the present time business in the buying and selling of pictures is almost at a standstill. It is not that the pictures of great artists have gone down in value : simply that it is practically impossible to sell them at any price. A friend of mine has a superb portrait of a lady by Tintoretto which three or four years ago he could have sold easily for anything up to £20,000. There are only seven portraits of women by Tintoretto in existence, and yet, when he offered it recently for £8000, he could not find a purchaser.

This state of affairs, while very unpleasant for the dealers, has not ruined them. Most of them made

so much money during the boom years that they can afford to wait for better times. But it is nothing less than a tragedy for artists, who even before the slump were—with a few exceptions—not doing too well. The fat prosperity of the Victorian era, when even such artists as Boughton, Marcus Stone, and Luke Fildes could keep up splendid houses in Melbury Road or St. John's Wood, had gone before the War. Some of the portrait painters—Laszlo and Lavery for instance—must make good incomes, but heaven only knows how the smaller fry manage to live.

I heard recently a pathetic story of Sir Alma Tadema's favourite model. She sat for several of his most popular pictures. The old lady, who fell on evil days, lived in one small room, but clung tenaciously to the few relics of her past celebrity, among them being a silk dress of a bygone fashion and an elaborate hat given to her by the artist (kept carefully in tissue-paper) in which she would attire herself to receive visitors in state. Fortunately, some friends of the family have come to her aid.

To return for a moment to the subject of works of art. A friend of mine who died last year was a great connoisseur of old-master drawings, of which he had a fine collection. Like most experts, he liked to concentrate himself on one thing at a time, so when he had acquired a drawing that he particularly fancied he was wont to fix it on the door of an *endroit*

which shall be nameless, in order to study it in peace. One day I called on him and was shown into his study. I waited for some time, and then rang for the butler and asked him : "Will Mr. L. be long?"

"I couldn't say, sir," he answered. "Mr. L. has bought a new drawing."

CHAPTER III

SOCIETY—CHIEFLY EDWARDIAN

THE London Season—as it was in the almost prehistoric days before the War—is dead ; dead as Queen Anne ; dead as the ancient ladies and gentlemen who totter along the sea-front on sunny mornings at St. Leonards or Bournemouth ; and, like them, it does not know it. The War was not wholly responsible for its demise though it hastened the process. It was a manifestation of social wealth and dignity incompatible with service flats, flying, high-powered cars, and restaurant life—it demanded big incomes, big houses, and unlimited leisure ; and those desirable adjuncts to life are all but vanished.

The gossip columns of the newspapers try to keep up the fiction of its existence. Every year, about April, we are told that the “coming season promises to be the most brilliant of recent years”, but what does it all amount to ? The Courts, the usual sporting fixtures, six weeks’ opera at Covent Garden, and a certain number of dances to advertise the attractions of the fresh crop of *jeunes filles à marier*.

One may spare it the passing tribute of a sigh,

for it had its uses. It stimulated trade and caused money to circulate, and the pleasures of the rich certainly benefited the less fortunate. It is, for instance, only when there are enough people who can afford to pay eight guineas for a box or thirty shillings for a stall at Covent Garden, for the poor opera lover to hear all the greatest singers in the world for a few shillings. Diaghileff once said to me: "My ballets delight all classes, but were it not for my rich and aristocratic supporters I should not be able to produce them."

How far off they seem, those London Seasons of the past, but in spite of their pageantry who would wish them back again? Though the standard of living of those, whom for want of a better word we must continue to call the upper classes, has been very considerably lowered, that of the masses has been raised to an unbelievable extent. They are better fed, better dressed, better paid, and have their share in the amenities of life. There is, indeed, a general levelling-up process going on. We shall soon have to replace the *Dieu et mon Droit* on the Royal Arms by the French *Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité*—even though our liberty is sadly curtailed and our fraternity a little acid. I wonder how this era will be labelled—or libelled—by future generations. Perhaps instead of saying A.D. 1934 they will call it 1934 B.B.C.

Whatever there is to be said for or against a

rich leisured class, there is no doubt that it produces more interesting personalities than does a society in which nearly everyone works and in which the contrast between those who have and those who have not is less glaring. There are very few of what the French call *des types* about London nowadays. Such men, for instance, as de Soveral, Labouchere, Charles and Marcus Beresford, Irving, Charles Hawtrey, and Beerbohm Tree.

The Beresfords were delightful company, especially Lord Marcus. He was very good-natured but loved teasing. My wife and I, at the beginning of the War, spent a week-end at the charming house he and Lady Marcus had in Windsor Forest. We had taken a house in Cadogan Place for the autumn and my wife was saying how terrified she was of the air raids. "Ah, Mrs. Colson," said Marcus, "you have reason to be," and he went on to explain that Cadogan Place being not far from Westminster, a trifling error in the calculations of the raiders would almost inevitably cause the bombs to fall near our home. "Let me see," said he, "you are No. 72, aren't you? I should think that's just about where they will fall."

Lady Stracey* told me of a lucky bet she made owing to him. She was talking to him one day at Newmarket, and he was teasing her about her lack of interest in racing. "You *must* have a bet," said he,

* Lady Stracey died in 1935.

handing her his card. "Just choose any horse you fancy and I'll place the bet for you." To his great amusement she chose a horse simply because she liked its name and insisted on having a fiver on it although it was a rank outsider and the odds were 100 to 1. It romped home, and all her women friends were furious, Mrs. George Keppel saying, "Why on earth didn't you put us on to it? You must have had inside information."

Lady Charles Beresford once told me an amusing story of Queen Alexandra, whom she imitated to the life. She—the Queen—had sent for two little violinists, youthful prodigies who were in London that season—Florizel von Reuter and Franz von Vecsey. Von Vecsey played Wieniawski's "Airs Russes", and when he had finished, Her Majesty said—not too tactfully—to von Reuter, "Now, little boy, let me hear how *you* can play that piece." Von Vecsey was so furious that he burst into tears and sulked, refusing to play again. "Horrid little boys!" said the Queen. "Take them away, Lady Charles, take them away."

Queen Alexandra was very fond of music, and another Royalty who loved it was the late Prince Albert of Schleswig-Holstein. He was a thoroughly good sort, simple and unaffected, and he adored England and the English. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to run over to London to see a big football or cricket match and meet his old friends.

I met him at lunch at Lady Newnes' one Sunday a few months before he died, and he said how much he would like to hear some Bach. "Well, sir," I said, "why not come to the Temple Church this afternoon? They are doing a Bach anthem, and I'll get my friend Thalben-Ball to give you a little Bach recital after the service." He was delighted, so off we all went and he enjoyed himself immensely. He loved playing bridge—for very low stakes—and he had a fund of amusing and slightly *risqué* stories that I have seldom heard equalled and which he told extremely well.

The political world just now is singularly lacking in real personalities, though the wobblings of some of our politicians remind one of the witty lines written some fifty years ago about Lord Balfour :

I'm not for Free Trade, I'm not for Protection,
 I approve of them both and to both have objection.
 In going through life I continually find
 It's a terrible business to make up one's mind.
 And it's always the best in political fray
 To take up the line of the Vicar of Bray.
 So in spite of all comments, reproach and predictions,
 I firmly adhere to unsettled convictions !

Balfour always found it very difficult when, like Queen Victoria, he was "not amused", to conceal the fact. He was once staying at a country house for an informal political gathering where several of the

guests were of the chosen people. One evening in the smoking-room, feeling bored to death with them all, he yawned, rose languidly from his chair and said : "To your tents, O Israel."

One of the most popular couples of Edwardian days was Admiral Sir George and Lady Maud Warrender. Lady Maud, had she not been born the daughter of an earl, would undoubtedly have been a very great contralto. Sir George was noted for his wit and geniality. On one occasion when some English battleships, including Sir George's flagship, were visiting a British possession, he and his brother officers made themselves so popular that when the time came for them to leave the Governor's wife and the English residents were inconsolable. One lady, when bidding him farewell, said, "I don't know *what* we shall do without you, Admiral. Before you came my girl was all military and now she is all naval."

"Well," said Sir George, "she will be all right so long as she doesn't go any lower !"

A very eccentric character of the go's was Baron de Stern. He was immensely rich and inordinately mean. One icy winter's day he astonished a crossing-sweeper, who plied his trade in front of the Baron's big house in Prince's Gate, by giving him sixpence. A few minutes later a footman came out and said to him : "'Ere, 'is nibs made a mistake just now :

he meant to give you this threepenny-bit, and he wants the sixpence back” !

I once saw him very angry. It was at a party, and the Baron, who was not a very distinguished-looking man, was mistaken by one of the guests for the butler, and asked for a whisky-and-soda. “I am not Mr. Gilchrist’s butler,” he replied rudely. “Sorry. Whose butler *are* you ?” was the retort.

I knew his sister, Lady Sherborne, very well. She too was very eccentric and almost as careful as he was. She told me she could count her income up to £60,000 a year, though she knew it was very much more. She once invited Lady Samuelson—Mrs. Herbert Samuelson, as she was then—to go to the opera with her. Of course, Mrs. Samuelson dressed for the occasion, tiara and all, and on arriving at Covent Garden, to her amazement and mortification she was led up interminable flights of stairs to the second circle. She was too good-natured to protest.

Lady Sherborne once asked me to the opera, a box this time. The other guest was Mrs. Edward Hore, who was enormously stout, as was also my hostess. I sat between the two ladies, who, having dined very well, soon went to sleep and snored loudly, waking up occasionally to murmur or grunt, “How lovely ! How divine !”

Another extremely stout woman was Miss Helen

Henniker, a social landmark in late Victorian and early Edwardian days. I once saw a very comic incident at Claridges in which she played the leading rôle. I was one of the guests at a lunch-party given by a friend of hers who had called at 4 Berkeley Street to pick her up in her brougham. Poor Helen had managed to squeeze herself in, but when she tried to alight she stuck fast ; behind, before ! And it took the united efforts of the footman and Claridges' carriage porter to haul her out. The joy of the visitors arriving for lunch can be imagined, and a small page-boy who could not contain his ribald mirth was soundly smacked by an under porter and sent back to his duties inside. Helen invariably went about with a bodyguard of good-looking youths who were, of course, known as "Helen's babies".

The number of those whom one may perhaps call the "Old Guard" who have gone to glory since the War is a rather unpleasant reminder of the rapidity with which time bears all its sons away. The Duke of Northumberland, Lord Frederick Hamilton, Lord Balfour, Frank Schuster, Arnold Bennett, Melba, George Moore, Lord Melchett, and William Gillett, to mention at random a few of the fallen. Apropos of Gillett, a girl told me of a rather unkind thing, which, quite unintentionally, she said to him at a dance. He was telling her that he did not mean to depart this life until the cause of the Allies

had triumphed, however long the War lasted. "Oh," she answered, "let us hope it will be over very soon."

Of those that remain, Isidore de Lara, tired and rheumatic, the snows of winter strewing those beautiful locks that retained their raven hue until so late in life, is still to be seen occasionally at Covent Garden, and he continues to warble "The Garden of Sleep" on the slightest provocation.* Mrs. Claud Beddington retains her title of champion non-stop story-teller at afternoon parties, and Mrs. Wesley Watson shows youth how to dance with all her old grace—charity balls only.

An intensely aristocratic Victorian who died recently was Lord Henry Somerset, who had resided in Florence for a great number of years. He was, I believe, in England at the time of his death, though it was reported to have occurred at his Florentine villa. He was extremely punctilious and woe betide anyone who had been honoured with an invitation to dinner who omitted to leave a card afterwards. His villa was a curious mixture of styles. Roman tessellated courtyard and Tuscan and Venetian *objets d'art* struggled with mid-Victorian furniture. I often dined with him there. Everything was very well done and we were waited on by good-looking Florentine boys dressed as gondoliers.

Lord Henry's marital relations were none too

* Mr. de Lara has since died.

happy, and he did not attempt to conceal his opinion of Lady Henry, whom he blamed as cause of his long exile. She was a temperance crank and, unfortunately, made her friends suffer for her opinions. She once asked me to spend a week-end at her country house, and the butler at lunch asked me : "Grape-juice or lemonade, sir?" "I think I should prefer a whisky-and-soda," I said. There was an awful pause, and Lady Henry said : "I am afraid there is none in the house as I am a strict teetotaller." I was so depressed that I went out and sent myself a telegram and returned to town on Sunday morning. That butler, by the way, looked as if he thoroughly sympathized with me. Menservants, who are the greatest sticklers in the world for "good form", loathe that kind of thing.

Lady Stracey told me that her extremely correct and, underneath it, extremely human butler, who has been with her since he entered her service as a young footman, once gave notice in a fit of pique about something and went to the late Duke of Grafton. A few months afterwards he came to see her and begged to be taken back. [I may add, she was very glad to have him again.] "What," said Lady Stracey ; "aren't you comfortable with the Duke?" "Everything is all right so far as that goes, my lady," he replied, "but I can't stand *His Grace's language*."

I was attending a musical party given by a lady—alas, now in heaven—who was a great patron of

music and who loved entertaining musicians. As the butler took my hat and coat, he drew my attention to those already laid out on the great hall table, some of which—for an evening party—were rather unconventional, and looking at them as if they had been brought in by the cat, smiled in a superior manner, saying, “Strange garments some of those musical gentlemen wear, sir !”

Personally, I think that the people who wait on us are some of the most delightful people in England if one treats them as human beings. I never could understand how Thackeray came to write *Jeames Yellowplush*. He must have been an appalling snob himself. If, however, you do not know how to treat servants, there is no end to the number of subtle ways in which they can make life unpleasant. I have never in my life met with anything but the greatest courtesy and kindness from all of them, as also from bus conductors, taxi-drivers and shop-people. It is wonderful how instantly and unerringly they can place you in your proper social niche. This innate recognition of class distinction is peculiar to England. It has its roots in that highest form of self-respect which is able to respect the claims of others. You will find nothing like it in other Countries.

A familiar figure one misses at the opera and the best concerts, is the late Lord Melchett. He was, in spite of his rather alarming appearance, a kindly

soul, but he certainly looked like the concentrated essence of all the synagogues. By the way, the text "Many are called but few are *chosen*" does not hold good in the City. So great is the Jewish influence that there is a movement on foot to rechristen the City gods "Gog and Synagogue" as a tribute to it.

For some of the older people time seems to have stood still. Among them is my old friend the brilliantly gifted Margaret, Ranee of Sarawak. She can still play you a Chopin valse or nocturne with a grace or charm often wanting in professional players. A little while ago she and Mr. Willie Reed of the London Symphony Orchestra gave a short violin and piano-forte recital one Sunday evening at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, which was broadcast. Seeing her a few days later, I said : "I see you were broadcasting last Sunday evening." "Oh no, dear," she replied ; "I only played a group of solos, and some duets with Willie Reed." She was sublimely unaware that she had had an audience of millions. She keeps absolutely up to date in literature, music, and politics, and is one of the most delightful and amusing talkers I have ever met.

The other day the Ranee told me with what exceeding frankness one of her cottage friends in Cornwall had dealt with her—she has a small place near St. Ives. The old lady had happened to read in a paper that she was going to London to attend a



MR. WILLIE B. MORRIS
[a very old friend]

public meeting, and went to see her, arrayed in a black bonnet and a cape covered with bugles. "Ye're off to London, m' dear," she said. "Take me with ye, to see to ye." The Ranee answered, "Oh, thank you very much, but I am taking my maid." She replied, "A maid ain't a friend. Ye're old and ye're fat and ye might go out like the whiff of a candle."

Then there is Mrs. Hwfa-Williams, who was one of the most gay and witty members of that brilliant set which revolved round King Edward. She is—dare I say it?—well over seventy, but she enjoys life as much as ever. Not long ago, at a masked ball in Paris, she so charmed a young Frenchman that he implored her to unmask before midnight and let him see her face. When she refused, he begged her to lunch with him the next day. She promised to do so and vanished. The youth waited for her in vain at the rendezvous !

Last summer, when she was living in a villa at Neuilly, the screams of her two macaws so disturbed her neighbours that they took counsel together to find means to stop the nuisance. One of them, Reginald Fellowes, was deputed to call on her and voice their grievance. Mrs. Hwfa fascinated him to such an extent that he forgot his errand, but subsequently he invited her to lunch and persuaded her to accept two rare tropical birds—for which, incidentally, he paid a hundred and fifty pounds—in

place of the macaws, which she sent to the Zoo. Alas, she forgot to give them their proper food and they died. When asked where they were she murmured sadly : "Naughty wild beast came in from the Bois and gobbled up poor birdies."

Mrs. Jefferson, too, is one of those Edwardians whom "age cannot wither nor custom stale". She entertains with a dignity rare to find nowadays. There are no more beautiful gardens in England than those of her country place, the High Beech, Hollington, and to dine on a summer evening in the *loggia* which overlooks them and the lovely Sussex country is one of those experiences which make life worth living. And the company and cuisine are always in keeping with the *mise en scène*.

Yes, they certainly stay the course, those Edwardian ladies. I wonder if the nervous, painted, cocktail-drinking women of the present day will be in at the finish in such good condition ?

Another veteran—though on meeting him that is the last name by which you would describe him—is Lord Richard Nevill—Dick to his innumerable friends. He has the gift of friendship. He is one of the most-sought-after guests both for country-house and for London parties, and his social activities would tire me out. Perhaps some of my readers will be able to "place" the lady who is the heroine of this story which Lord Richard told me recently.

A hard-riding lady recently made herself very unpopular at a well-known Midland hunt. She was constantly swearing at the "old stagers" for getting in her way or for out-riding the hounds, and one day excelled herself. Hounds were running through a park and checked near the house. The lady yelled at another woman who was close to the pack and told her to hold hard. She did not do so, and was treated to a volley of oaths and told she had better go home. She answered sweetly : "This *is* my home."

Lord Richard tells a story concerning a friend of his who had heard from her son, who was on the staff of the Governor of South Africa. The letter was full of a shooting expedition on which he had accompanied "His Excellency", and he enclosed a number of photographs. His mother proudly related her boy's exploits to a friend and summed up the "bag" : so many elephants, lions, tigers, and so on. "But," remarked the friend, "there aren't any tigers in South Africa." The reply was : "There must be, as there are lions, and *tiger is the female.*"

One of Lord Richard's sisters, Lady Brassey, has a charming place called Park Gate, near Battle, and going there to lunch one day last summer I was gently put in my place by a gardener's boy. I had never been there before, so I asked the youth who was working just inside the drive : "Is this Lady Brassey's

house?" "That's right," he answered. "You'll be wanting the back entrance" !

I often see my old friend Willie (W. B.) Morris. He is one of the best and kindest men I know and he is immensely popular both in the City and in the West End. A few years ago he took to himself a young and extremely attractive wife, and the experiment has proved a complete success. From the first he has—as he himself puts it—"treated his wife as if she might one day become his friend". An amusing incident occurred before she realized that he had quite abandoned the gay bachelor ways of his "Albany" life. One day the youthful son of a friend telegraphed asking him to put ten pounds on a certain horse for him, and knowing that the boy's father would highly disapprove of the transaction, he told his secretary that if anyone telephoned she was to say that he had gone to Newmarket. While he was away at lunch his wife called up and was given the message. There was more than a slight coldness when he returned to Wilton Place, and only his reputation for truth saved the situation.

It was Morris who helped me so much with regard to educating the young pianist Solomon, and putting him on his feet. I heard Solomon again recently "after many days". If only his intelligence and power of interpretation equalled his fingers, he would be a very great artist.

There have been very few Americans about lately, for which, I think, our state has been none the less gracious. But then, I married one, so cannot speak without prejudice. One would imagine that the fall in sterling would bring a lot of the more civilized among them to this country, especially as for once they themselves are suffering from financial depression. Most of us are able to regard with Christian resignation the inscrutable decree of Providence in thus afflicting them. It is undoubtedly causing them to cease looking on us with the contemptuous pity of the rich uncle for the impecunious nephew. My wife, on her return from New York in 1927, said that when England was mentioned in society, well-bred Americans lowered their voices and went softly as one does in the presence of the dying.

Our relations with our American "cousins" would be far more satisfactory if only our politicians could succeed in acquiring some slight understanding of the Yankee mentality. Neither in politics nor in sport does the American play the game as it is understood over here. His aim is to "put it over" his rival, and if in return you "put it over" him, he respects you for it. From respect comes liking and mutual good-will. As a race Americans are, as the French say, *foncièrement malhonnêtes*.

They are a strange people. Their sense of humour—such as it is—is entirely their own. They like to hear

it described as "dry humour". Perhaps it is, but it is the dryness of ginger ale, not champagne. There is not a trace of irony in it and, unlike the French and we English, they can never laugh at themselves. If they were able to do so, they would surely see the comic side of their self-righteous indignation at what they call the "default" of the French—a nation so incomparably superior to them that it can hardly be mentioned in the same breath—when they themselves had no scruple in bilking us of the huge sum they borrowed during their Civil War. Benjamin Webster, their greatest jurist, said that they had not a shadow of justification for their dishonesty.

There are, of course, many delightful Americans. One of them, a woman who, like most of them, adores titles, told me an amusing story of her first visit to England. She was crossing from Calais with her nephew, and the sea was decidedly choppy. He settled her in a deck-chair beside a very agreeable Englishwoman who at once began to chat. Presently the waves began to put in a spot of work, and the American lady, who was not at all a good sailor, called out to her nephew: "Oh, Paul, bring me a basin!" "And me too," moaned the Englishwoman. During their stay in London, Paul was asked to an evening party, and his hostess said: "I want to introduce you to the Marchioness of Ripon, who likes Americans." Directly

Lady Ripon saw him, she began to laugh and gasped out : "Oh, Paul, bring me a basin !" It was the lady of the boat.

I liked the way another fair New Yorker described her sensations on the Channel. "I was that sick I nearly brought up my stockings."

I met at lunch recently an American lady who will never again order strawberries in London when they are out of season without first asking their price. She and her daughter were staying at a fashionable West End hotel, and seeing strawberries (of which they were inordinately fond) in the restaurant, ordered them to be served at every meal. At the end of their stay, their bill included the item : "To strawberries : £23 *os. od.*"

It is curious what a passion Americans have for living in public. They seem lost if thrown on their own resources. In provincial towns the gardens, or "yards", as they poetically call them, invariably face the main road, and on summer evenings the whole family congregate on the "stoup" (American for porch). In every happy home the wireless and the gramophone are set going and softly modulated voices engage in friendly conversation with their neighbours across the road. They love hotels too, and when, as at the Plaza in New York every afternoon, about a thousand ladies assemble for tea, the screaming suggests that the monkeys at the Zoo have invited the

parrots to a party. A friend who married a rich American woman once said to me : "Sally's idea of paradise is Claridges without the weekly bills." Well, Claridges has its advantages ; they give you your morning paper free !

CHAPTER IV

WRITING AND WRITERS

IF Solomon found the literary output of *his* day excessive, I wonder what he would have said had he seen the catalogues of the London Library, or a Sunday paper of 1934 ! Probably something very rude ; especially after he had looked through a few of the latest novels. And yet had King Solomon been able to take out a subscription to the Times Book Club for each of his three hundred wives—all princesses—and seven hundred concubines, it would certainly have made his domestic life pleasanter. Those thousand ladies must have wanted a good deal of amusing, and a course of Aldous Huxley or Ursula Bloom would have passed the long intervals between the visits of their lord and master.

They must have been a hardy lot, those old Israelites ; the fact that the pretty rulers of the various tribes managed to produce three hundred princesses to wed Solomon speaks volumes for their virility. Even the prolific Coburgs in the days of Albert the Too Good were as nothing compared with them.

Like silver, they would not have been "anything accounted of" in the days of the great king.

In ancient Palestine the subjects were all ready to hand for the author ; indeed, there was an *embarras de choix*. A country in which war, murder and rape were the staple industries was obviously made for the writer of sensational fiction. Nor were the more subtle crimes, above all *les crimes passionels* lacking. In the career of David, the man who oddly enough was "after God's own heart", there is material for at least twenty novels.

It is curious how very few composers of opera have gone to the Old Testament for their librettos. With the exception of *Sanson et Dalila* there is not one founded on a biblical story in the current repertoire. A first-class libretto could be written on the story of Ahab and Jezebel, and the David and Uriah incident would make an equally good one.

I used to regard authors with considerable awe, but now that I have discovered how easy it is to concoct a book of sorts, my respect for the majority of them is somewhat lessened. Arnold Bennett once said to me that all that was needed in order to write were the three P's : patience, pencils, and paper, plus perspicacity. All the same, I think a little more went to the writing of *The Old Wives' Tale*, and the other Five Towns books, if not to his later works, which are pregnant with platitudes.

Bennett was a kindly and thoroughly human creature in spite of his somewhat unprepossessing appearance. He could be very amusing when he liked. He once asked me to lunch and on sitting down said : "I shall have to eat a very light meal as I have been bothered with indigestion lately."

"So have I," I answered.

"Thank you for the compliment," said Bennett.

"You mean the complaint," said I.

"No, the compliment : indigestion is the sincerest form of flattery."

"Or rather the sincerest form of flatulence," I answered, determined to have the last word.

It is, of course, much easier to write one of the nasty little sex novels that so many young people are writing just now than to write a real story. All you have to do is to take half a dozen people of varying degrees of abnormality. Make your hero, if a married man, fall in love with the youngest daughter of his best friend, who, in *his* turn, loves the hero's wife. Their son then commits suicide because he loves the girl his father loves. It sounds somewhat complicated, but it is really quite simple. There is a good deal of talk about white bodies, and muscles rippling under satin skins, and lavatories loom large in the offing. The various couples invariably go away together for week-ends. A modern young novelist tells us how, after her young couple have passed a night of love,

the girl says to the young man at breakfast, "Just read me the racing news while I down this sausage !"

In another morbid book I read recently, the author makes his hero, a fashionable young doctor, live in Gough Square. I suppose he thought that as Dr. Johnson had lived there it was eminently suitable for a medical man. All the characters in this type of book are profoundly worried about the problems of life and they are desperately unhappy. After reading a few of them one goes back to Dickens, Trollope, and the adorable Jane Austen with a sigh of relief.

Few books of recent years have had so great a success as Dr. Axel Munthe's *Story of San Michele*. Dr. Munthe is now rather infirm and almost blind, but he is a most interesting conversationalist. We met in the late Mrs. Sam Courtauld's box at the opera, and had supper together. We talked half the night, as he is devoted to music, and I know Capri and San Michele very well. When I last saw him he was much upset by the death of his lifelong friend, the Queen of Sweden. Munthe, when he lived in his own country, was *persona gratissima* at Court ; but he was no respecter of persons, and his rather autocratic ways caused him to be none too popular.

During the Queen's last illness, the King had arranged to go to Venice, and Munthe told him that he ought not to leave her, as she was so ill. "But," said His Majesty, "she has been in this condition for

the last eight years, and she does not seem to be any worse." Munthe merely replied, "If you go, sir, I shall cease to attend Her Majesty." He then went to the station and cancelled the arrangements for the royal journey on his own responsibility. He is devoting all the proceeds of the *Story of San Michele* to the Italian society for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

Speaking of societies for the protection of animals, the ex-Queen of Spain once thought of founding one in that country, where it is much needed. She consulted a high official of the Court as to the best means of raising funds, and he answered: "Well, the first thing we must do is to organize a big bull-fight for it."

A book that interested me immensely was Frank Harris's *Bernard Shaw*. Harris was an unspeakable person, but I agree with him that if Shaw's name survives for many years after his death it will be as a personality, not as an author, in which capacity he has been grotesquely overrated. He is, of course, devastatingly clever, but there is no tenderness in his nature, and he is without that deep love for humanity and sympathy with its sorrows and its frailties which tempers the cynicism of Anatole France, who, like his inimitable M. Jerome Coignard, "*méprisa les hommes avec tendresse*". Shakespeare, whom Shaw affects to despise, was full of that *tendresse*.

Personally I would give the whole of Shaw's output

for *The Importance of Being Ernest*, which, I imagine, will survive as a supremely witty and brilliant illustration of a certain phase of life in the nineteenth century in the same manner as does Congreve's *The Way of the World* with regard to the Restoration period. I like the way Wilde summed up Shaw as "A man who has no enemies but is heartily disliked by his friends."

Shaw is a first-rate musical critic, and I am inclined to think that he did his best work when he was on the staff of the *World* in that capacity. He recognized the supreme greatness and the profound significance of Bach's music when it was "caviar to the general", and told the Bach Society that it was the "music of the future" and that they would have to change entirely their manner of performing it. He had the same love for Mozart, but his judgment of Brahms was curiously inept and pig-headed, as indeed his judgment of anything or anybody he dislikes has always been. Unlike most musical critics, he is never dull. When I want to read something interesting on the subject of music, I generally have to pick up one of my own books, but Shaw is always readable.

Stories of his ready wit are innumerable. Lady Hammond-Graeme told me an amusing one. He was sitting next to a very smart and attractive girl at a dinner-party, and she was extremely annoyed because

he hardly spoke to her, addressing all his conversation to another guest. Turning to her other neighbour, she remarked : "I think he is a disgustingly rude old man, and for two pins I'd give him tit for tat." Shaw leaned over to her and said, "Tat !"

Shaw has a keen sense of the value of money. Nigel Playfair told me that when his second boy, Lyon, was at Harrow, the school dramatic society wanted to give a performance of *Arms and the Man*, and Lyon, being connected with the theatrical profession, was deputed to write to the great man and ask him to waive the usual fee. Now, spelling was not Lyon's long suit when he was fourteen. In his letter he asked permission for the boys to play *Alms and the Man*, and went on to say that they could not afford to pay the five guineas, but that they would share the "prophets" with him. Shaw refused to make any concession. He preferred the law to the prophets !

After all, he has certainly amused the world, and if only for that, he deserves its gratitude. The younger generation are refusing to be impressed by his posing, and have taken to their hearts Aldous Huxley, who has no objection to being worshipped. Indeed, when he visited India to lecture, attired as a poet and Socialist *should* be attired, he was most annoyed at the indifference of the rather sporting and Philistine military set, who, most of them, had never heard of him. They mistook him for the famous

scientist Thomas Huxley, of whose death most of them had not happened to hear.

A far better book than Frank Harris's *Bernard Shaw* was Hugh Kingsmill's *Frank Harris*. If he had called it *The Cad's Progress*, or some such name, it would certainly have been a best-seller, as it is an intensely interesting character-study of the world's greatest "bounder". Kingsmill has not yet come into his own. He is an admirable writer, human and witty. In his *Table of Truth* there are devastatingly funny parodies of P. G. Wodehouse, Dr. Johnson, and A. E. Housman, and a cruelly subtle one of Lytton Strachey.

The writer of today, however talented, has very little chance of surviving. New books, like troubles, come not in single spies, but in battalions. Among the scores of "great" novels, "great" books on every conceivable subject acclaimed every year by triumphant reviewers, there must be two or three that deserve to live—even among the novels. Probably many of the works which are part of the "furniture" of every library would have been long since forgotten had conditions up to the last decade of the nineteenth century been similar to those obtaining now.

It is curious how portentously serious are many of the post-War writers. Even Mrs. Humphry Ward was not more so than is Sacheverell Sitwell, and the novels of Mrs. Virginia Woolf—which are so subtle that their meaning, I must confess, frequently eludes

my feeble understanding—are destitute of the smallest gleam of saving humour. Perhaps they are right. In England, people with a sense of humour are rather distrusted. No really successful politician or business man possesses it. Gladstone was incapable of seeing the funny side of anything, and it took Disraeli forty years to live down his reputation of not being serious-minded.

Lady Stracey told me that when a very young girl she once sat next to Gladstone at lunch. Having been well brought up by her brilliant father and told that she must do her best to entertain his guests, she looked at the great man rather nervously and said : “I believe you are interested in Home Rule for Ireland?” With that the old gentleman glared at her and, drawing himself up in his chair, gave a lecture on Home Rule that lasted twenty minutes.

A feature of the modern novel which is difficult to understand in these days when everyone is in a hurry is its terrific length. I wish Hugh Walpole had not been bitten by this craze for taking three or four pages to describe what could be equally well described in a paragraph. To my mind his best novel is the brilliant and rather cruel *Old Ladies*. The “Rogue Herries” people do not, I think, stay their interminable course.

I once nearly had the honour of collaborating with Thomas Burke, who suggested that we should

write a book together. It was to be a series of letters between two old friends, one living in Mayfair, and the other in Theobalds Road, which is, I believe, in Camden Town. I was allowed to live in Mayfair, and we were each to describe our own worlds and the various happenings of our daily lives. Burke invented a rather charming family named Groon with whom he lodged. When I described my doings during the "Little Season" he described autumn in Camden Town ; the return of the muffin man, those felt things like sausages that East Enders buy to keep out the draughts from their windows, the hot-chestnut and baked-potato merchants, the little maidservant whom he loved, and so on ; all told with his unique knowledge of humble life and philosophy. We got about half-way through, and then found that somehow or other our two worlds did not make contact. I hope he will give us an entire book about the Groon family ; they are too interesting to bloom unseen in Theobalds Road.

I do not think that Burke has achieved quite the position to which his abilities entitle him, perhaps because he suffers from the inferiority complex. He told me of an amusing incident that happened to him at Paddington Station. He always travels first-class—not, as he says, for swank, but in order to be able to think out those delightful stories of Limehouse with which he presents us from time to time. One day

last summer he was going to Pangbourne, and had comfortably settled himself in the corner of a smoking-carriage, when a porter came up to the compartment, looked him up and down and said : "Hi, you're in a first."

As I was dying to collaborate with some celebrity I suggested to that great scholar and gifted writer, the Master of the Temple,* whom I am proud to be able to call my friend, that we should write an improving novel together. My publisher told me that there would be a big sale for a really good one. My suggested title-page would certainly have helped matters :

LITTLE ERIC'S CONVERSION

BY THE

REVEREND S. C. CARPENTER, D.D.

Master of the Temple, and Chaplain to H.M. the King.

Author of *Democracy in Search of a Religion*, etc., etc.,

and

PERCY COLSON

Author of *I Hope They Won't Mind*

Alas, my suggestion fell on deaf ears !

The Master showed me recently a French version

* Now Dean of Exeter,

of *Hamlet* which contained a priceless translation of "O my prophetic soul ! my uncle !"

It ran : "*O mon âme prophétique, c'est Monsieur mon oncle !*"

He told me, too, an anecdote about the self-made churchwarden of a North Country seaside church who had an enormous sense of his own importance. At a certain point on the cliffs from which there was a very fine view he caused a bench to be placed. On the back was a rather pompous inscription ending with the words : "Presented to the people of — by So-and-so", and underneath : "The Sea is His and He made it."

It must be very difficult for a publisher to judge what books are likely to be successful out of the hundreds of MSS. submitted to him. Who would have thought that *The Mysterious Universe*, or *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* would be best-sellers? Not that they do not deserve their success, but in neither case would one have cared to predict such popularity. The taste of the reading public is extraordinarily capricious. Personally, I consider Lytton Strachey's *Books and Characters* to be by far his best work—the essay on "Madame du Deffand" is one of the finest essays in the English language—and yet his *Queen Victoria* sold in thousands and *Books and Characters* in hundreds.

Not every writer has the luck of a barrister friend

of mine who, when he was a young man, wrote a book of poems which he had published in an *edition de luxe* at his own expense. The bill was presented and not paid. Two years afterwards, when he was beginning to get on, he came across it one day and thought it was high time to clear matters up. He went to the publisher, who received him very politely, saying, "Very few authors who have a biggish cheque owing to them wait so long before claiming it."

"What do you mean?" said the barrister. "Did you sell out the edition?"

"Well, not exactly," was the reply. "We sold five copies, but you may remember that you instructed us to insure your poems for a hundred pounds, and a year afterwards we had our fire and they were destroyed."

The little post-War boom in poetry seems to have died—killed, one imagines, by the modern poets. I wish I could appreciate Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and company. To me they seem human only when they for a moment forget themselves and become lyrical! True, the young of today are somewhat bitter and disillusioned, but bitterness and disillusion were not born yesterday. Housman could express them—and how! I used to play tennis with Ezra Pound nearly every day at Rapallo. Like Esau, he is a hairy man, and he wore queer clothes to play in—rather like workmen's overalls. When excited,

he uttered wild whoops—the war-cries of his tribe, I suppose.

Even Mr. Noyes has produced better verse than some of the ultra-modern poets in vogue. I have a sincere admiration for Mr. Noyes. To have succeeded in persuading a number of people—chiefly Americans—that he is a poet, is in itself a claim to greatness.

Last summer I saw a good deal of young Richard Rumbold, whose novel *Little Victims* created a *succès de scandale*. He is a nephew of Sir Horace Rumbold. Really the Roman Catholic Church made itself supremely ridiculous over the book. Father Ronald Knox quite lost his usual sense of humour. Rumbold has talent. He is very young, not much over twenty-one, and when he has got over the idea that he was born to set right a world which is admittedly out of joint, I should not be surprised if he made a name as a writer.

Speaking of the Roman Catholic Church, I was recently told a story of a well-known priest who went to Paris with several other priests for some conference. Out of compliment to his position he was asked to hear confession one day at a popular church. Now, his French is elementary in the extreme, and he did not grasp the fact that one of his penitents was confessing that she had given birth to an illegitimate child. Using the same phrase which he had used

successfully to the others, he murmured, "*Vous avez, avez-vous ?*" and promptly absolved her.*

What an enormous number of children's books are published every Christmas ! And yet the old ones continue to be popular. Most of my small boy friends read Henty, *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's*, and even Farrar's *School Stories*. Last Christmas I was buying a book for a little chap of twelve, and when I asked him what he would like, to my amazement he said *St. Winifred's*, because he had just finished *Eric, or Little by Little*, and had loved it.

Very small children are singularly indifferent to the charmingly written and beautifully illustrated books written for them by professional writers of juvenile literature. The more simple the language in which their stories are told and the brighter and cruder the illustrations, the better they like them. Some years ago the then seven-year-old son of Nigel Playfair spent the summer with us in Hampshire. If ever there was an intelligent child, Andrew was one. He had all the books which the ultra-intelligent give to children (and which their elders read), but he would have none of them. After lunch every day he was supposed to rest for an hour, and he insisted on my reading him stories from a book called, if I remember rightly, *Tommy Tubbs in Turnip Town*. He knew that damned book by heart. It was no use trying to skip

* *Si non e vero e ben trovato !*

a few lines or even altering a passage. "That's not it ; *please* read it properly," implored the devastatingly punctilious infant. Though he only half believed in it, all the giants and witches thrilled him, especially when I read with due dramatic expression. He would squeeze my hand and murmur : "Isn't it lovely?"

I have lately given up reading detective novels ; they are all so much alike, and really, if Scotland Yard's sleuths act as they do in a good many of them, I can sympathize with the old lady who, after reading half a dozen murder stories, said she quite approved of the movement for the sterilization of *detectives* !

Here are some suggestions for your library list. They are not mine, and if I were to tell you the name of the very famous author who gave them to me, "you'd be surprised".

The Clue of the Constipated Curate, by Max Beerbohm.

How I Became Converted, by Dr. Inge.

For He Himself Has Said It, by Osbert Sitwell.

Philosophic Flatulence, by Aldous Huxley.

How to be Happy Though Harried, by a Gentleman of England.

Rhymes for Tiny Tots, by Edith Sitwell.

CHAPTER V

SATURDAY TO MONDAY

I HAVE just come back from spending a long weekend at a country house, and once again I realize how little I am cut out for a country life. It has its charms, and I feel the beauties of nature as only a born townsman *can* feel them, but there is something curiously sad about it, especially in the autumn after sunset, just before it gets dark. In the busy town we can forget "how little while we have to stay", in the country—never. On Sunday evening I went for a walk before dinner, hoping to work off some of the too-good meals I had been eating, and from the time I got out of the park until I reached the village—more than two miles—I saw nothing but a ploughman homeward plodding his weary way, a dissipated little rabbit scurrying home to its mother, painfully aware that it was past bedtime, and a belated cow looking mournfully over a hedge.

By the way, Paul Evans, the late military attaché to the American Embassy, once asked me if I knew the difference between an American chewing gum and a

cow chewing the cud. The answer is : "The intelligent expression on the face of the cow."

But to return to the country (God forbid !). The only way to enjoy it for any length of time is to go in thoroughly for country sports. Now, I cannot shoot, and to hunt I am ashamed, as I ride too badly. Golf bores me to death, and I have given up tennis, so there is nothing left for me but walking. Another thing I have against the country is breakfast. I cannot resist game, and lured by the prospect of cold grouse, I generally turn up for it, instead of having my tea and toast in bed in a *civilized* way.

If you are going to indulge in violent exercise the English breakfast is, of course, an admirable institution. It cannot be beaten. Nobody bothers to talk ; you just drift in at any time up to ten-thirty or so, nod with ill-concealed dislike to anyone who happens to be in the room, and help yourself to cold grouse, partridge, devilled kidneys and bacon, ham, egg dishes, curried prawns, grilled soles, fruit, tea, coffee, or whisky-and-soda. But if—like myself—you are a sedentary person, it renders you incapable of any further effort for the rest of the morning. Far better possess your soul in patience till dinner-time.

English cooks understand game very well so long as they are not asked to depart from their traditional manner of cooking it. I have never in England eaten *faisan truffée* or *bécasse flambée viel Armagnac*.

It is difficult to understand the mentality of those cranks who would like to see hunting forbidden and who think shooting a cruel sport—fancy September without partridges ! Like Ann Taylor, they feel :

Ah ! poor little partridge and pheasant and hare,
I wish they would leave you to live :
For my part, I wonder how people can bear
To see all the torment they give.

I know one of them, but I never knew her refuse roast pheasant !

We played a lot of contract bridge. Auction—if you have once played contract—is as dull as “old maid”. Before long there will not be any auction players outside museums. You get some queer bridge in the country. One woman I played with had not grasped the fact that auction and contract are not the same games, and called two spades on *five to the nine*, over my two-club call (playing the convention), because I “had only one club partner and nothing else”. As I had everything except spades, I went six no trumps, was doubled and set four tricks. Such people should not be allowed to play bridge. They are a social scourge.

I am very fond of bridge, but I cannot take it as seriously as some people do and I thoroughly dislike most bridge clubs. They seem to bring out all the most unpleasant characteristics in human nature,

especially in women. A woman—one of the world's worst players—with whom I once played at a London club, used, when her mistakes were pointed out to her, to say in that acid manner one meets only in bridge clubs, "We play quite a different game at Ealing." Another one wept when we claimed the penalty for her revoke because, "I did it quite unintentionally." I resigned from my last bridge club after a stout Jewish lady, whose bosom looked like a young jeweller's shop, remarked: "If you 'adn't 'a' led a spide, partner, they would never 'a' mide their three 'earts.'"

One meets all sorts of types at the bridge table. There is the depressed player who looks as if he held a "yarborough" even when he is busy making a slam; worse still, the optimistic one, because more dangerous. But of all players I hate most the slow ones. Rubbers played with them always seem as if they would go on until the "last trump". "Make your mistakes quickly", is a motto that ought to be framed and hung in all clubs and places where they play bridge.

There are almost as many books now written on bridge as there are on theology, and each writer is just as convinced that *his* method is the only way of salvation. No one, however, has, I believe, written one on the humours of the game, its little tragedies and comedies. It would be a good subject. Bridge has long ceased to be a mere game; it has become a

serious pursuit—indeed, a profession, and it should be easy to write an intensely interesting book on it.

Bridge stories are innumerable. Here is one about King Edward, who was an enthusiastic, but rather indifferent, player. He was playing one evening with Mrs. George Keppel as his partner. It was just after "auction" came in. Mrs. Keppel dealt, and went a dealer's "one no trump". And though both their opponents had called suits, he raised her to "four no trumps" on a very poor hand. When he put it down, she looked at it and remarked : "The King can do no wrong, but God help Alice Keppel !"

On another occasion when they were partners, she played by mistake the knave instead of the king. "Why didn't you play your king?" asked His Majesty. "I am so sorry, sir," she answered. "I always mistake the king for a knave."

King Edward liked telling how one day when he had been lunching at Brighton with his friend David Sassoon, and had left the house on foot, a boy who was waiting near asked him the time. "Just half past three," he answered. "Well, sir," said the boy, "they say the bloomin' old King is inside that 'ouse, and I've been waiting for an 'our to see 'im come out, and I ain't goin' to wait no longer ; he ain't worth it." "I quite agree with you," said King Edward, laughing, "but there's no need for you to wait any longer. I'm the 'bloomin' old King'."

King Edward must have possessed a delightful personality. Since King Charles II, no monarch has succeeded in so dominating the social world, but he made it rather difficult for his successor ; a difficulty which that great and good King George the Fifth so nobly overcame. It could not be said of him what Gertrude Stein wrote in one of her more lucid moments :

Lives of great men oft remind us,
We should leave no sons behind us !

But all this has nothing to do with week-ending, which, by the way, seems to a slight extent to be less popular than it was. Even so recently as two years ago, London on Sunday was a desert ; it was useless to expect to find anyone about. Recently, however, I went to one of Beecham's Queen's Hall Sunday concerts and saw a lot of people I knew, and Quaglini's was full for lunch.

I once spent the week-end at the house of a most charming friend who had been a distinguished Government official in the Colonies, and who had married the odious daughter of a rich South American financier. I was walking round the grounds with her, and she saw one of the gardeners doing something of which she did not approve.

"Who told you to do that ?" she asked.

"Sir Henry, my lady," replied the man.

"I pay you, not Sir Henry," said the dear lady.

She took us all to church on Sunday evening—the church was near the house—and at the sound of the dressing-bell we all trooped out in the middle of the service !

One day one of the footmen came into the library where I was sitting with her husband, and said :

"If you please, Sir Henry, I want to give notice."

"What, another of you ! Aren't you comfortable ?"

"Yes, thank you, Sir Henry."

"Want me to raise your wages ?"

"No, thank you, Sir Henry."

"Then what the devil is it ?"

"If you please, Sir Henry, we can't stand her ladyship."

"But look how long I've stood her."

"Yes, Sir Henry ; *but you're obliged to, and we ain't !*"

They had a charming small son, though, an infant of some six summers, and like all children of the present day his mind was thoroughly mechanical. A little cousin, a Roman Catholic, was paying him a visit, and he asked me if he ought to remember the Virgin Mary in his prayers as the other kid did. A difficult question, but I did my best to explain to him that, important as that Lady is in the hierarchy of Heaven, he had better address his petitions direct to the head of the firm. "Oh, I see," said the impious child

reflectively. "It's the difference between a Rolls-Royce and a Daimler."

For people like myself, who do not go in for sport and who take no pleasure in digging in a garden and planting things—which a gardener invariably does far more competently—there is nothing like a town. And it is a mistake to imagine that the country is always quiet. There is nothing on earth more noisy than a farm, and in a village inn sleep is generally impossible after 6 a.m. Thomas Burke once said to me that he could not imagine how anyone intelligent could live in the country, but that is going too far. Town produces a different type of intelligence; not necessarily a higher one. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Edward Fitzgerald, Hardy, and Lytton Strachey, for instance, can hardly be accused of a lack of intelligence.

Another country joy that is overrated is the converted cottage. It has ceased to be a cottage and is far from being a country house, and it is nearly always inconvenient and uncomfortable. My wife and I took one for the last summer before we finally went our respective ways, and I am convinced that life in that cottage did much to bring about the rupture. It belonged to the wife of the editor of a well-known paper and was about two miles from Dunmow, in Essex. That summer it rained every day and all day, and the cold was so arctic that we had to have fires in our bedrooms throughout July and August.

There was practically no society in the neighbourhood, so we naturally saw a good deal of the owner of the cottage, who had a rather larger one close by. Now, my wife and she, both being what the French call *difficile*, did not really like each other, and in their honeyed civilities there was always an under-current of hostility.

One day, my wife, who, being an American, considers that modern plumbing and civilization are synonymous terms, discovered a bad smell in the garden—it really *was* a bad smell, in fact, a first-class stink—and sent an urgent message to the owner to come and smell it. The lady, however, having guests, and feeling, no doubt, that she had quite enough smells of her own, declined the invitation none too politely ; and then the band began to play. As both ladies were wholly devoted to their pet dogs, the matter might have been satisfactorily arranged had she only sent her terrier to do the smelling. The puppy would not have been disappointed by the odour. But, alas, she didn't !

Each spake words of high disdain

And insults flew from one to t'other*

They parted ne'er to meet again.

But I do not think that the dreary sea that now rolls

* This line may have appeared in Coleridge's first draft of "Christabel". It doubtless would have done so had he thought of it.

between them causes either of their hollow hearts any paining.

While on the subject of domestic differences, I had an amusing experience when last summer I appeared before a Master in Chambers at King's Bench to settle a dispute with my wife, who, after the manner of her charming sex, had, when she departed, annexed all my pictures, books, and works of art.

"What were your relations during the time you lived together?" asked counsel.

"Oh," I answered, "extreme affection one day, rows the next, and then sulks for a week."

"I see," remarked the Master—"normal relations."

I enjoy week-ending, but am always glad to get back to London. If I ever have to live in the heart of the country, give me a big house with plenty of servants, large gardens, horses, and cars. Otherwise, as the late Sam Lewis used to say, "you can 'ave the country".

CHAPTER VI

LONDON TODAY

IT is now nearly four years since I returned to my native land, and nothing on earth will induce me ever to leave it again for a long period. One gets tired of travelling. I agree with the Frenchman who said : "*Toutes les villes sont les mêmes ; des maisons à droite, des maisons à gauche, et la rue au milieu. C'est toujours la même chose.*" We English are in some ways the most civilized people on the face of the earth, and London wears better than any other town I know. They are changing its appearance a good deal, which is, of course, inevitable. Houses will tumble into decay, and business buildings and streets become inadequate to modern conditions and to try to rebuild in the fashion of a day that is done would be merely ridiculous—though penal servitude for life would not be too severe a punishment for the vandals who rebuilt Regent Street and those who sanctioned the crime.

In every age architects planned and builders builded according to the most up-to-date methods

then known. I expect Westminster Abbey was the very last thing in modernity when it was erected. But however much the external aspect of London changed, it is always the same to its children. Were I returning to New York after three years' absence, I should expect to feel stranger than a Rip Van Winkle. Paul Morand says that if you leave it for a week-end you cannot recognize your own street when you get back, and that if you see a calm and serene face it is always a dead one.

London does not change violently ; there are still quiet streets with dignified old Georgian houses ; the best shops of twenty-five years ago are still the best shops, and people are as kindly and tolerant as ever. It is the only town I know, where, if you go away for two or three years, you can on your return resume life exactly where you left it. There is so much to do that only your most intimate friends notice your absence. "I haven't seen you about lately," said a man to me when I came back after three years' absence. "Have you been away?"

Another delightful thing about London is its hospitality. London people are infinitely more hospitable than Americans, who, if you go to their country with good introductions, make a great fuss over you, entertain you with lavish ostentation, and then promptly forget your existence. But in London, once you have been accepted, you may do almost any-

thing—except time!—without being forgotten by your friends.

In this year of grace the chief qualifications—indeed, almost the only ones—necessary for London life are to be amusing and to have done, or to be doing, something interesting. Birth no longer counts, although a public-school accent is still useful and you must catch the trick of the kind of talk in vogue. If, however, you are considered amusing, nothing matters. One popular playwright whom one meets everywhere has done everything from blacking shoes to serving before the mast, while the parents of another kept a lodging-house. People who are gay and agreeable get more invitations than they can fit in. There is no need for them to talk like one of the characters in a play by Freddy Lonsdale, or to try to imitate the epigrammatic platitudes of Lady Oxford.

Fashions, too, change slowly in London. In spite of the fact that one is always being told that the cocktail habit is dying out and that people are going back to sherry, they seem to me to be as popular as ever. Any excuse serves for a cocktail party; it is impossible to get a charity ball going without at least half a dozen.

I once went to one at Rosita Forbes' (Mrs. Arthur McGrath) amusing home in Great Portland Place, which, like herself, is very up to date. There are no pictures; the walls and ceiling of the drawing-room

are bluish-grey, the decorative effect being obtained by the architecture and the lighting. To give colour there are brilliantly flowered curtains and great jars of chrysanthemums. The doors are of wrought steel and glass. Downstairs there is an attempt at an Egyptian boudoir. The whole house is undeniably effective but hardly home-like. It would be ideal for a super-smart beauty parlour or a Paris scent shop. I rather expected to come on glass cases containing the perfumes of D'Orsay or Guerlain in elaborate bottles.

I wonder if in her heart Rosita Forbes does not like best the delightful and thoroughly conventional library with its panelled, book-lined walls, thick carpets and big club chairs. It is a kind, serious room, like Rosita herself when she is not *en représentation*. The servants at this party were dressed as spooks or witches. and the cocktails were named "Hell Brew", "Rat's Bane", and so on. All the Bright Young People were there, looking rather dull and standing solemnly round with glasses in their hands and cigarettes in their mouths.

As a matter of fact, such parties never are the scenes of wild gaiety that envious suburbanites who read about them in "Social Notes" imagine them to be. I have seen more real gaiety at an old ladies' charity tea than I have ever seen at any of them. Most cocktails are poisonous concoctions, and I am quite sure that if one drank two or three without the ice

and the shaking, one would be promptly sick. Then, too, cocktail parties take place at an idiotic hour. If you are dining out, you have to rush back to dress, and arrive at your dinner tired and nervous ; and, in any case, cocktails ruin both your appetite and digestion.

Here is what a famous French gourmet says about them : *“Tous les snobs qui préconisent les cocktails, les écrivains qui publient en volumes des recettes de cocktails, les hurluberlus qui installent un bar à cocktails dans une armoire de leur salon, devraient être poursuivis par la brigade mondaine au même titre que les marchands de cocaine et d'héroïne. Ce sont des malfaiteurs, des empoisonneurs publics, des assassins sournois et souriants, plus dangereux encore que les autres, parce qu'ils inspirent moins de méfiance.”*

Women like cocktails because they are cold and refreshing and have the same kick that a glass or two of champagne has. They need bucking up, as they are always on the go. Half the women I know spend their lives rushing from one thing to another and get very little genuine enjoyment out of it all. They exclaim : *“Oh, darling, how thrilling !”* half a dozen times a day, and I wouldn't mind betting that any little typist at two-pounds-ten a week gets more of a thrill when her young man takes her to the pictures and then to Lyons' Popular Café to supper.

Soon after the publication of *I Hope They Won't Mind* I went to live in Alexander Place—a charming

old-world little street off Thurloe Square. By the way, the Master of the Temple paraphrased the title of that book very neatly as a suggested title for one of those cheery modern novels in which all the characters are degenerates and sex-ridden and which invariably end in deep gloom : *I'll Mind They Don't Hope*.

My rooms were delightful ; so was my landlady—an elderly Scotswoman who had spent most of her life in service in the “best families”, and—oddly enough—had managed to preserve a profound respect for them. She had a supreme contempt for what she called “jumped-up people”, and her social distinctions were inimitable. She “placed” instantly everyone who came to see me. They were “real gentlemen, gentlemen, and persons”. These last, if they did not leave their names, she described as “a person who looked as if he wanted something, sir”. She was a first-rate cook, and the fact that I am totally helpless as regards domestic matters was a recommendation in her eyes. She liked me to be visited and called up by my titled friends, and she knew their genealogies and their family histories as well as Debrett—better, indeed, for she often told me things about them that are not recorded in that invaluable work. She used some queer expressions. Most of the houses in Alexander Place had, she told me, been “ruttet out”, i.e. completely modernized. Some of them rejoiced in “parrakeet flooring” !

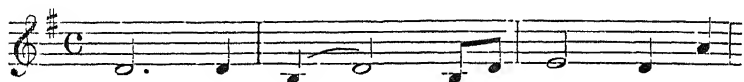
They are rather pathetic, these kind, elderly spinsters who serve you so faithfully and are content to live in a dark draughty basement. And if it gives them pleasure to gossip a little about the families they have served and the social life whose wheels they have so much helped to run smoothly, who would deny them this harmless gratification ?

Alexander Place is a favourite haunt of itinerant musicians. By the way, it is a sign of the times how good some of them are. There was a violinist who came regularly who was quite up to concert form, and there was also an excellent harpist. But the one I liked best was an old gentleman covered with medals who sang to us every Wednesday, always the same song. Here it is :

“I was walkin’ one dye
Through London’s great throng.
I met a pore boy,
’E was singin’ a song.
No friend but ’is Miker,
’Is parents was dead ;
Altho’ ’e was singin’
’E wanted for bread.

“The cold it was crool
As ’e went on ’is wye.
With a tear in ’is eye
’E would kneel down and pray.
No friend but ’is Miker,” etc.

A man who sold or mended something or other used a cry that must be as old as the hills. You hear very few of the old cries nowadays, so here it is :



The worst of London is its sunlessness. One wakes up day after day to that dreary greyish-yellow atmosphere which looks as if nature were bilious. I suppose that some day science will enable us to switch on sunrays just as one now turns on the electric light. Speaking of rays, my doctor told me that he once asked one of his patients if she had been X-rayed. She answered : “No, but I have been *ultra-violated*.”

This is almost as good as a story a French friend told me about a rich manufacturer in Normandy who was very anxious to get his daughter married, and proposed her to one of his clerks. While overjoyed at the chance of a rich wife, the young man, suspicious as only a Norman *can* be, insisted on knowing why he was to be honoured with her hand. The old gentleman hesitated for a long time, and finally said, “*Eh bien, mon petit ; elle est un tout petit peu enceinte, mais tu sais, c’est un rien !*”

Alexander Place had for me the advantage of being near Brompton Square, where lived Herbert Coleman,

whose small but extremely well-chosen collection of "Post Impressionists" I was never tired of admiring. I illustrated these pictures in *Apollo*. Among them were Courbet's "La Neige" and Cézanne's "Nature Morte", which attracted so much attention at the French Exhibition. Alas, the slump in Industrials has hit poor Coleman badly, and he has had to dispose of most of his works of art, and give up his charming little flat in Paris. All this has resulted in a severe nervous breakdown, from which he is still suffering. Herbert Coleman, who certainly has an extraordinary flair for art values, came from Manchester, and had only recently retired and settled in London.

Modern art is sometimes sadly misunderstood. My friend Annesley Gore, who is one of the most fascinating and hospitable men in London—*how* he understands ordering a dinner!—and who also has a wonderful collection of works of art, told me an amusing story of Epstein's "Genesis". When it went on tour a year or two ago through the courtesy of its owner, the late Mrs. Alfred Bossom, who wished as many people as possible to see that enigmatic masterpiece, it was visited by an old woman whose sight was none too good. She stood in front of it for a few moments speechless, and then said to her husband, "Well, she's a fair 'orror. If *Guinness* makes yer look like that I'll never touch another drop."

Gore told me the other day a story of Wellington

Koo, the famous Chinese Ambassador, which was new to me. At a public dinner Koo was seated next to a distinguished Anglo-Indian colonel of the "Damn all heathen dagoes" type. Feeling, however, that his very superiority necessitated a kind word, he growled, "*Likee soupee?*" Receiving no reply, he muttered, "The beggar can't even speak pidgin English." When the time for the speeches arrived, the toast of "The Visitors" was given, coupled with the name of the Chinese Ambassador. Wellington Koo rose, and made a witty and charming reply in perfect and highly polished English. On resuming his seat, he turned to the discomfited soldier and murmured: "*Likee speechee?*"

Gore has recently taken to portrait painting, and ought to do well at it. He has long been an excellent painter, but hitherto has not exhibited.

It was at Alexander Place that I wrote my *Life of Melba*. I enjoyed writing it, though most of it was written under considerable difficulty—in bed during and between operations. It had a great success, and the reviewers were extraordinarily kind to me. I had only three bad notices. It is curious, though, how critics disagree, even on what one would imagine to be essential points. I called the book *Melba: An Unconventional Biography*, as I wished to make it rather a history of the social and operatic conditions of the period than a mere Life of Melba herself—she was



THE GIRL WITH THE RED HAIR
by Sir Joshua Reynolds
[In the collection of Miss Mackenzie of Foveran]

so entirely a product of her day. In this I feel I to some extent succeeded, as Vita Sackville-West, in her broadcast talk, said it was one of the best pictures of Edwardian days that had ever been written. But the critic of a famous London Sunday paper wrote that the book was spoilt by my insistence on my own "unimportant opinions" on men and matters. Another equally well-known writer and reviewer considered those same digressions so interesting that he said they would form the basis of a stimulating book of essays. One London Sunday paper said it was a "nagging book", another that it was "kind and serene". So you pay your money and take your choice.

I had much the same experience with another book, *Victorian Portraits*. *The Scotsman*—admirable journal!—said that everyone ought to read and ponder it; but the *refained* critic of a well-known Northern daily paper had no use for me. I was "vulgar", "like a mischievous small boy", "inconsistent", and "a mud-slinger"! As he, however, was alone in his opinion, I can only imagine that he was of as bilious a complexion as was "Harriet Martineau", the subject of the sketch which most aroused his wrathful indignation.

Among the critics, no one has been kinder to me than that clever writer Hugo Wortham, and his kind and hospitable wife, Sadie.

After all, the question of liking or disliking a book

depends greatly on whether the personality of the author pleases or irritates one. Augustine Birrell in one of his essays says that in every book the author reveals as much of himself as he does the subject about which he is writing. And if his personality is a vivid one it is bound to make enemies of those whose reactions and opinions are not in sympathy with it. But it will also make friends, as I myself have discovered, for I am constantly receiving letters from readers all over England who have liked one or other of my books.

Margery Lawrence—what a delightful woman!—told me of a queer experience she once had. She received an enthusiastic letter from an admirer—whom she took to be a woman—inviting her to lunch at the Savoy and promising her some valuable material for a new book. Always on the look-out for “copy”, she went, and was confronted by a full-blooded negro.

The general shortness of money did not seem to make any difference to the French Exhibition, which was as disagreeably crowded as was the Italian. I never can understand why it is that people who never go near the National Gallery or the Tate Gallery, and who are apparently unaware of the marvels to be seen at the British and South Kensington Museums, flock in their thousands to these special exhibitions. The ivories, missals, illuminated manuscripts and

majolica at the South Kensington are as fine as anything that was to be seen either at the French or Italian shows at Burlington House, and the missals and medieval manuscripts at the British Museum are infinitely finer, but I question if ten per cent of the people who flocked to Burlington House had ever seen them.

One can understand why people like "private views". They go to stare at the celebrities. I wonder where the dear old gentlemen wearing those incredible morning coats—and even frock-coats—live during the rest of the year. One never sees them at any other function. Perhaps they are "laid up in lavender". Some of the silk hats, too, must be seen to be believed. Then there are the old ladies hung with funny jewellery and bits of lace, and wearing Edwardian hats. A private view, especially the Royal Academy spring one, affords one an admirable opportunity to study the fashions . . . of forty years ago !

Talking about exhibitions, Lady Baird told me of an amusing incident that occurred to her at a picture show in Bond Street. She went in with her husband one day when there were very few people present, and just before lunch there was only one visitor left—a lady. Sir David, who is very near-sighted, did not notice that his wife had just gone into another room, and, walking up to the other lady, snatched the catalogue from her, saying : "Come along. What on earth

are you hanging about for? I want my lunch." To his horror, however, the lady was a complete stranger. He and Lady Baird apologized profusely, and the lady, who took it very well, said, laughing, "He was very violent, but I didn't show fight, did I?"

Lady Baird told me of another incident which occurred at a dinner-party she attended. One of the guests was a popular author—since dead—who stutted very badly and who got into conversation with a fellow guest who suffered from the same complaint. They compared notes, and the author said, "I am g-g-g-going to c-c-consult Dr. Bl-Bl-Bl-Black to-morrow." "Bl-Bl-Black?" said the other. "Why, th-th-that's the man who c-c-c-cured me!"

Such an incident adds to the gaiety of a party. There are others that have quite the contrary effect. One of the most *manqué* dinners I ever went to was given by a hostess new to London. She had asked a very well-known woman who is separated from her husband and also—of course, quite innocently—the lady who, as everyone knew, had caused the trouble, and who was wearing some magnificent rubies. The hostess kept admiring them, to the obvious embarrassment of their wearer. After dinner I ventured to "put her wise". The unfortunate lady was horrified at her *faux pas* and promptly proceeded to make matters worse by humbly apologizing to the owner of the husband (not of the rubies!), who took

the apology most graciously, saying, "Oh, it doesn't matter in the least ; everyone knows Tim gave them to her."

I was at a lunch-party not long ago at which a charming youth who only left Eton two or three years ago was also one of the guests. A rather stiff, elderly lady asked him, "What are you doing now, Dicky?" and he calmly answered, "I'm on the dole !"

Everyone thought he was joking, but it was quite true. He had accepted a small position at a famous fur shop in order to learn the business, and his valuable services had been dispensed with. As he said, "Our class finds most of the money to run things, so why shouldn't one get a bit back?" Why, indeed ! I told him that with his good looks he ought to get a job as a husband, but he said he couldn't find a suitable *young* wife, and didn't want a rich old one, unless she understood gardening well enough to realize that young plants should be bedded out.

Dicky is a person of infinite resource. A certain foreign royal Princess who was greatly attracted by his good looks happened to say to him one day that she had never been to a night-club. "Won't you allow me to take you to one?" said he gallantly. The Princess accepted his invitation eagerly. Then came the serious question of ways and means. A visit to a night-club meant a show : now, you can't go to a night-club

in cold blood, and even the best show is but Dead Sea fruit unless you have first dined well.

After much thought Dicky went to the proprietor of a famous restaurant and said : "How much would it cost me to give a dinner of eight here if I brought H.R.H. Princess ——?" He was assured that it would cost him nothing at all. Much encouraged he then addressed himself to the manager of a popular revue. Here he was offered two boxes knocked into one for his party. After this it was with the air of one conferring an honour on the establishment that he demanded supper at London's most exclusive night-club. The total cost of the evening was some two pounds expended in tips.

A social favourite of another type is Mr. J. H. Thomas, who, by the way, is a first-class bridge player. There are many stories told about him, but this one is, I believe, authentic. During the Cabinet crisis, after the pound slumped, he was leaving 10 Downing Street one day when he met a friend, who said to him : "Well, Thomas, how goes it? Ministers all chosen?" "No," replied Thomas; "there's been an 'itch." "Too bad," said his friend. "I suppose that means we shall have a *scratch* Cabinet."

One good scratch deserves another.

A Jewish friend of mine told me a pretty little story of a wealthy peer—also a Jew—who lacks the social graces which his family consider necessary to his

exalted position. "Couldn't you get Father to look after his nails a bit ? They are a disgrace," said his daughter to her mother one day. "I can't help it," answered the poor woman. "Every time the manicurist does my nails she does his too, *but he will scratch his head directly afterwards.*"

Here is a quotation from a circular shown to me by Lord Richard Nevill. It was sent out by the committee of a country choir competition.

A Meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at 2 The Priory, on Thursday, April 14th, at 11.30.

AGENDA :

To decide whether to return the Entry Fees of Choirs which scratched owing to the small-pox.

Criticisms and suggestions.

Any other business.

Some of the most amusing stories going the rounds concern the late Lord Birkenhead. On one occasion he was sent by his Party chief to speak at a by-election. Now, Birkenhead was not a prohibitionist, but he could always be relied on to make a brilliant speech, even when a little under the weather. "How did Birkenhead get on ?" asked the chief of the candidate on the following day. "Was he all right ?" "Rather ! Quite at his best. *He was full of spirits,*" was the answer.

Birkenhead, indeed, was always full of spirits. He must have been a delightful companion. Few

people, I imagine, enjoyed life more. Here is an instance of his ready resource ; it was told me by a friend who was present at the function in question. At a public dinner he once attended, a very prosy Member of Parliament was making a more than ordinarily boring speech, and, having nothing whatever to say, was saying it at great length. "Will nothing stop him?" said Lord Birkenhead's neighbour. "I'll bet you a fiver that I make him sit down within a minute," was the reply. With that he tore off a bit of the menu card, wrote a few words, and, calling a waiter, said, "Give this to the gentleman who is speaking." The speaker glanced at it, looked very uncomfortable, and, bringing his speech to an abrupt end, sat down hurriedly. "What on earth did you write?" asked Birkenhead's friend. "Oh, nothing," he answered. "I merely wrote : '*Your buttons are undone !*' "

CHAPTER VII

MY NURSING-HOME

L' *HOMME propose et Dieu dispose!*—and *Dieu* disposed of me, for in spite of my preference for living in London, the time was at hand when I should, for a while, cease to shed the light of my countenance upon it. It all came about through a visit to the theatre.

The play was of the Grand Guignol type, and there was a lot of business with knives and knock-out drops on the part of the leading man and two other actors. Female interest was provided by three mysterious ladies robed in white, who hovered round like the three women in the *Magic Flute*. I didn't care much for the show ; indeed, before the curtain fell on the first act, I had lost all interest in the proceedings. The theatre, I may say, was in a nursing-home not a hundred miles from Portland Place.

They are expensive places, these nursing-homes ; but if one *must* undergo an operation, they certainly manage the unpleasant affair for you with the least possible discomfort and inconvenience. Ten weeks

seems a long time for a busy social person to be withdrawn from circulation, but it is wonderful how time passes when everything seems to revolve round one's self and one's every need and wish are anticipated and attended to with infinite kindness and efficiency.

All illness is humiliating, especially a big operation which reduces one practically to the condition of an infant, needing to be lifted, washed, and even—for the first day or two—fed. How anyone, however important he fancies himself, can still keep his dignity and “swank” after undergoing one is difficult to understand—but some manage to do so. Most people, however, when they are seriously ill, shed their pretences and reveal themselves as they really are.

The owner of the home where I stayed was a charming woman—wise, kindly, competent, and blessed with a keen sense of humour. Like so many owners of nursing-homes, she had originally been a nurse, and herself did the dressings for certain favoured patients. What she didn't know about human nature wasn't worth knowing. She frequently took pity on me in the evening after visitors had been banished, and told me stories of some of her past patients. Naturally, she never mentioned names,

One story concerned a *very* well-known man who went there to be operated on for appendicitis. Sir Arthur—let us call him—was, she said, the most difficult person she had ever met, and the nurses

could do nothing with him. Soon after his arrival he sent for her and said : "I want you to do something for me, and keep your mouth shut. Three ladies will be coming here to see me. Now, mind, *they must not meet.*"

She promised to do her best, and, sure enough, the day after his operation a very smart society woman called to see him. She had not been left with him half an hour when another visitor arrived. Miss W. asked her to wait in the reception room and, going upstairs, said : "I am very sorry, Sir Arthur, I must ask your visitor to leave. His doctor is here and wishes to examine him." When she was safely out of the way, number two was shown up ; but her stay was equally short, for number three, a popular and charming little actress, came to see him, full of solicitude.

Sir Arthur died, simply because he absolutely refused to obey his doctors and nurses. He insisted on getting up to shave himself the day after his operation and struggled with the nurse who tried to get him back to bed. He had a tremendous idea of his own importance, and during his illness had received several press men, even giving them a draft of what he wished said in case of its having a fatal result.

Soon after the announcement of his death lady number one arrived with a sheaf of lilies which, with tears, she laid on his breast. Hardly had she gone

when number two brought white roses. Miss W. kept her waiting downstairs a few minutes while she bundled the lilies into a cupboard where they were soon joined by the roses, for the pretty actress appeared in deep mourning and with many sobs covered him with violets.

"At last I can breathe again," thought Miss W. ; but she had reckoned without her host. A fourth lady was shown to his room, bearing a wreath of forget-me-nots. It was his wife, not too overwhelmed with grief to insist on knowing where the violets came from.

Here is a story of a patient who was not so kind to his lady visitors—at any rate, to one of them, a famous Australian prima donna. He had told Miss W. that if she came to see him she must on no account be allowed up. She duly arrived in a big Rolls-Royce and swept into the hall, where she was met by Miss W., who said to her : "I am sorry, madam, but Mr. ——— is not well enough to receive visitors." "Woman, do you know who I am ?" said the singer, pushing her aside and walking upstairs, where a terrified young nurse showed her the room. "Tommy, darling !" she began, when a furious voice from the bed called out : "Take that damned woman away !"

Once a very united couple called ; a large, important-looking lady with a nervous, diminutive husband, who was evidently in mortal terror of her. He was to have an operation there, and before he

went in, Madam wished to see the nurse who was to look after him. "I am afraid that is impossible, as I never can tell in advance on which case my nurses will be engaged," said Miss W. "Why do you wish to see her? All my nurses are thoroughly competent." "I dare say," was the answer; "but I won't have him nursed by a young and pretty girl with a fringe. She might flirt with him!" Miss W., very indignant, told her that that sort of thing did not go on in *her* home, and that her husband had better arrange to go elsewhere. Very reluctantly the lady said: "Well, I suppose I must leave it to you, as the doctor wishes him to come here."

He had his operation, and one evening a few days later Miss W. was sitting in her private room when an infuriated lady burst in, calling out: "And you can sit there calmly writing while my husband is locked in his room with the nurse!" "How dare you come into my room like this?" said Miss W. "The nurse is probably doing his dressings, and in any case you have no business to go upstairs without being announced. Go and wait in the reception-room and I will tell him you are here." As she supposed, the nurse had locked the door while she was attending to the poor little henpecked husband. His wife was asked to leave and not to call again after visiting hours.

But some wives are more gentle. One lady, whose husband was leaving the home to convalesce in the

country and who had been told that she herself could easily do the slight dressing still necessary, but that the nurse would have to show her how to do it, said coyly : "Oh, Miss W., I am sure I can do it without being shown. If Nurse is in the room with us it will *spoil the romance*." I may say that the gentleman's operation had made sitting down difficult.

Another patient was a young journalist who sighed for love. One evening when Miss W. was making her rounds, on saying good night, she asked : "Is there anything else you want, Mr. ——" "Yes," he replied. "I want love." "Well, you have the cat—what more do you want?" said Miss W. (He had taken a great fancy to her cat and it was sitting on his bed.) "I want love—warm, human, palpitating love," said the youth. He was told that love was not included in the fees.

Not long ago one of Miss W.'s clients was a lady whose education had been somewhat neglected. Her husband had recently made his fortune and migrated from Shoreditch to Lancaster Gate. One day, when getting better, she was sitting by the window and saw a very fine car draw up. "Who is that?" she asked the nurse. "Oh, that is the Duchess of B. She comes to see her niece, who is here," said the nurse. The lady then said : "If my friends knew as 'ow I was 'ere, you'd 'ave a string of cars right along the street." "Barrows !" said Nurse under her breath.

This particular lady, by the way, required massage

after she left, and Miss W. agreed to do it herself. "What is your charge?" asked the lady. "I usually charge a guinea a visit," said Miss W., "but as it will be a long job, I don't mind reducing it." "How dare you suggest that I can't afford to pay you!" said Madam. "You will charge me just the same as if I was a duchess."

A recent patient had been a rich East End contractor, very popular with his employees, who was so desperately ill that he was expected to die at any moment. His foreman came to see him and was much concerned at the bad news. The next day he telephoned to inquire and, to his surprise, heard that his employer had taken a turn for the better and that there was every chance of his eventual recovery. "I'm delighted to hear it, but all the same, it's a bit awkward," said the foreman. "What shall I do with the money I've collected for a wreath?"

Nurses do not marry their "cases", as they call them, nearly so often as they are supposed to do, but it does sometimes happen, and they are frequently left money by grateful patients. One of Miss W.'s nurses was the heroine of a charming little romance which sounds like a story by Ethel M. Dell. She nursed the heir to a peerage and they fell head over ears in love with each other. Alas, his haughty kinsmen made such a fuss about the match that the girl, who was as proud as Lucifer, released him—much against

his will—from the engagement. Two years later she was sent to the country to nurse a certain noble lord, a widower, who also fell in love with her and proposed. She refused him, but consented to see him through his illness. Just before she left, his son came to pay him a visit and lo and behold, it was her quondam lover. Of course, all ended happily.

Notwithstanding the possibility of such happenings, I have never met a nurse who did not tell me that were she able to choose again she would adopt any other career rather than nursing. How on earth any woman can want to marry a man after she has seen him operated on “and dressed his wounds that were so red” is quite beyond understanding. How often did *I* say, despairingly, to my nurse, “Hast thou found me, O mine *enema* !”

Nurses have to watch some of their cases very carefully. One patient, a popular society girl who was operated on for appendicitis, had several visitors on the first day she was allowed to see people. After they had left her, Nurse found her quite “blotto”, murmuring ecstatically, “Ish lovely here, ish lovely here.” They had brought her cocktails in their handbags !

Miss W., soon after she became a nurse, was sent to Hawarden to nurse Mr. Gladstone. She did not like either the G.O.M. or his wife, who, she said, watched him like a cat watches a mouse and hated leaving her alone with him. She said he was

extremely fond of food and ate at all hours, demanding a solid meal at 3 a.m. He was a very bad patient and hated pain, and he prayed so loudly that you could hear him all over the house.

I was interested to discover that both doctors and nurses seemed infinitely to prefer hospital work to ministering to their more prosperous patients. The famous surgeon who operated on me told me that he found far more gratitude, patience, and endurance among the poor than in the fashionable nursing-homes, and their sense of humour never fails them.

Hospitals—especially those in the East End—are not the places of tragedy one is apt to imagine. My nurse told me of one very damaged lady who was brought in to Barts', and when asked how she received her injuries, replied : "Well, sir, a lydy and gentleman in our court was a-foighting, and Oi tried to separate 'em, and the lydy threw a kettle at me." Another lady who had been attacked by a neighbour said to her : "Put on lots of bandages, please, Nurse, an' she'll get two months' 'ard."

The house surgeon at a London hospital once had an awkward experience. Two drunken women had been fighting, and one of them was taken in with her face pouring with blood. No sooner did she see him than she flung her arms round his neck and greeted him lovingly, insisting that he was her husband who had left her some years before.

Both doctors and nurses told me that children, especially small boys, make the most charming patients, but the children of the poor are sometimes rather startling. One day a little chap about four years old was knocked down by a car and hurt just in front of the house, and Miss W., who loves children, had him brought in and looked after. He was, she told me, the loveliest and most angelic-looking infant she had ever seen, and when he was getting better, she said to another convalescent patient : "You must come and look at our baby angel." The lady looked and fell for him instantly, exclaiming, "Oh, you darling ! Won't you give me a kiss ?" But Master Four-Years-Old was fractious and wanted his mother, and, looking at the lady with intense distaste, said : "Go 'way, you bl——y old b—t—h."

Poor people, they told me, are extraordinarily anxious to help. "Give me something to do, Nurse," is the everlasting cry—mending, sweeping, if they can get out of bed, washing-up, anything. Most of them don't care much for reading and like only picture-books and papers. There has been a good deal of nonsense talked about the early hour at which the hospital day starts. If early rising were not the rule, the work would never be got through, and it must be remembered that most of these people are used to getting up very early. They sleep a good deal during the day, as noise does not disturb them ; they are too

used to it, and they settle for the night very early. Their kindness to one another is wonderful ; it is quite a common thing to have a collection for some particularly hard-up patient.

The friends of the patients have to be carefully watched to see that they don't smuggle in undesirable food. The wife of a man who was in an East End hospital for a stomach operation was only just prevented from leaving him a nice little meal of whelks. A Polish Jew who brought his little boy to the same hospital, said to the house surgeon : "Make him well, Doctor. I give you silver watch, gold watch, any watch you like." Unfortunately the child died, and his father and mother were heart-broken. They brought a "wailer" to the hospital ward, and they all wailed together. Christians were not allowed to touch the little body ; the parents themselves performed the last rites, holding it under a tap before putting it in the coffin.

But these people are not more ignorant than some of the *nouveaux riches* who can afford a fashionable nursing-home. My doctor told me of a lady who was shortly leaving one and who was very much exercised in her mind as to where she should go to recuperate. "Where do you suggest, Doctor?" said she. As he was taking the nurse's report he paid no attention to her question, saying, "I think she had better go back to cascara, Nurse." "But," said the lady, "I've

never been there. Can't I go to Aix-les-Bains? It is so smart and amusing."

I suppose doctors do more unpaid work than any other class of the community. One can hardly imagine lawyers or stockbrokers getting up in the night to attend to clients from whom they would never receive a penny!

The other day I was told a charming story of a famous surgeon who is always extraordinarily kind to the poor. On one occasion he saved the life of a little girl whose parents, poor working-people, could not afford to pay him. About two years afterwards the mother called at his house in Harley Street, saying: "I don't suppose you remember me, sir, but you cured our little girl two years ago, and we want you to accept this." She produced an envelope containing twenty pounds and told him that they could afford to pay it as her husband had lost a leg in an accident and had received five hundred pounds as compensation.

On another occasion his kindness was less appreciated. A poor man who had seen several doctors and who was growing steadily worse, called to see him and was given three-quarters of an hour of his valuable time. He was told what was the matter with him and exactly what to do to cure himself. On leaving he was heard to mutter: "'E ain't no class. 'E took the best part of an hour to

go over me, and my panel doctor did it in five minutes."

But in spite of the kindness of my nurses and doctors and also that of my friends, who overwhelmed me with fruit, flowers, books, and visits, I was very glad to leave. On my mantelpiece there stood one of those temperature charts which are the joy of nurses' hearts. They are marked : "Date of arrival, Disease, Diet, Result." I took it from its place and after the last word wrote sadly : "Broke" !

But at any rate they have postponed my flight to the celestial regions, or to the bottomless pit, which after my recent experiences I am inclined to think I should prefer.

CHAPTER VIII

RECUPERATING

AS luck would have it, my recovery coincided with the serious illness of the pound and the ban of foreign travel. In better financial weather—national *and* personal—I should at once have betaken me to Italy or the South of France for the winter, but it was out of the question. Where could I go? The “English Riviera” is a delusion and a snare, and a country village would drive me to drink. I asked my doctor to suggest some place not too far from London so that if I felt bored I could easily run up for a day or two, and he sent me “here”.

No, I will not tell you where “here” is, but you get to it from Charing Cross. I originally intended to stay for three or four months and, lo, nearly a year has flown by and here I still am, for oddly enough I like the life.

When I arrived, the town had resumed its normal aspect of decorous dullness, for it is definitely not just the “seaside” and considers itself a winter resort, and, in its heart, is convinced that Cannes has “nothing on it”. It merely tolerates the weird young

women wearing cheap pyjamas of violent hues who eat ices at its few and dreary cafés and with true British courage try to imagine that it is very like Juan-les-Pins. Nor does it approve of the naked and lovely little water-babies who, in August, make its beach look like Queen Mab's garden. Such goings-on are doubtless all very well at Margate or Southend, but—"Really, my dear, these cheap excursions and motor-coaches are making the place *quite* impossible."

The young and frivolous are, I fear, apt to find our town rather dull. There is no casino where you can have a little gamble and lunch delightfully in a restaurant overlooking a sunlit sapphire sea, and the shops hardly suggest those of Monte Carlo. But there is always the pier and slot machines are less expensive than baccara.

As a matter of fact, the young are not encouraged here ; we have no use for them. Nowhere, however, will you find so many girls and boys between seventy and eighty as are to be seen crawling along the sea front on any fine morning, or in wet weather sitting in the shelters looking at the cold grey sea and the whirling seagulls. The old ladies wear those strange shapeless garments and pathetic hats and shoes of which only old English ladies seem to possess the secret. The old men—mostly retired military men—are decidedly more agreeable to look at ; they are still jaunty and well set up. No Army officer ever

quite loses the well-groomed appearance that is the hall-mark of his caste. They pass the time talking over the old happy days when, young and joyous, they went out to India and hunted, shot and danced. "The country is going to the dogs," they sadly lament; "nothing is like what it was thirty years ago." Nothing ever was! *Laudator temporis acti!*

Those of them who are not too old play golf, and the fortunate ones who can enjoy music can pass an hour or two in the long winter afternoons listening to the excellent orchestral concerts at the pavilion, which are in the charge of a well-known conductor.

The green and its neighbourhood is our most fashionable quarter. Victorianism still lingers there. Miss Smith-Jones, aged eighty-four—who lives at number seventy with her younger sister Miss Emily, who is only sixty-nine and whose girlish frivolity is a sad trial to her—clings to antimacassars; has glass shades over the drawing-room ornaments and portraits of Queen Victoria and the Ever-Lamented adorn the walls. But in some ways they are quite up to date. They had electric lighting installed at least five years ago and now they have a wireless!

I went to see them one evening last summer and found them sitting in the dusk listening to Mr. Lansbury speaking on public wash-houses, or some such subject. They enjoy particularly the broadcast church services, and any caller who happens to drop

in when one is in progress is expected to join them in prayer and praise. If anything goes wrong with the set, Miss Emily—who rather fancies herself as a wireless expert—gets up and puts it right, politely apologizing to the Almighty for interrupting the proceedings.

Miss Smith-Jones does not approve of the easy-going democratic ways of post-War society. "I can remember the days when Americans and tradesmen were not received," she tells us, shaking her trembling old head.

Their neighbour, Major Brown, an active lad of sixty-five, interests himself in local affairs. He goes for long hikes into the country, returning with draggled specimens of the "lesser dandruff" or the "greater woodwart" for the wild-flower garden of the public park. He also collects silver paper, a hobby which sometimes makes walking with him a really thrilling experience. He listens vaguely to your most sprightly sallies and suddenly freezes your blood by darting in front of a motor-lorry, and—miraculously escaping death—retrieving a piece of silver paper which has wrapped the chocolate of some untidy child. I believe that when he has collected a ton or so he sends it to the "Prisoners' Aid Society", who bestow it on poor but deserving coiners.

You see strange dogs on the green. Old Lady Jenkins owns one which is the joy of her life. "Binkie

is not a prize dog," she says. He certainly is *not*. His body suggests that of a Peke, whose papa—a gentleman of mixed ancestry—has trifled with the affections of his lawful spouse and been unfaithful to her with a Pomeranian. The poor beast is almost as old as his mistress, and, to say the least of it, a bit niffy, but she insists on bathing him in the family bath, to the great annoyance of her husband, whose lurid language can be heard all over the green when the windows are open.

Binkie, who is essentially a town dog, hates the country. I was once invited to motor with him and when on a road, skirting the downs, he was set down to have a run, his frantic rushes in every direction to find a lamp-post were heartrending.

This is a churchy place ; High Churches, Low Churches, Broad Churches, even chapels—which, of course, can hardly be mentioned in polite society—are all well filled. What else is there to do on Sundays beyond giving thanks for not being as other men are ? The cinemas are closed and no one entertains—except to tea.

Perhaps the favourite church is St. Loyola's, and no wonder ! It is so Anglo-Catholic that it is a show in itself and to some extent makes up for the lack of Sunday entertainments. The "Fathers" try to get as near to their spiritual home, Rome, as they can. One of them at the bookstall of a charity bazaar

held in the parish hall came across a book by Anatole France. He touched the accursed thing gingerly, saying : "This must on no account remain here : *it is on the Index !*"

The Sunday-school children have a fine time. They have little vestments and a miniature *service de messe*, and they enjoy themselves hugely playing at being priests. St. Loyola is a godsend to innumerable old ladies who almost live in it, attending every one of its incessant services and quarrelling as to who shall have the honour of cleaning and decorating the elaborate altar on which a powerful floodlight is directed. It is also a godsend to the chemist opposite. The poor old things are not allowed even a cup of tea before they attend 6.30 mass. So on the cold winter mornings they are apt to faint, and have to be lugged out and given restoratives. And then : "Perhaps, madam, you are a little run down and need a tonic?"

Those who do not like St. Loyola wax very indignant over it, but, as a kindly tolerant old lady remarked, "What *does* it all matter so long as the dear boys enjoy themselves?" What, indeed ! One might, however, add, so long as the faithful do not, like the Pharisees, make broad their phylacteries to the extent practised by one old lady who asked an assistant priest at St. Loyola's on which side of the bed she ought to say her prayers. He answered,

tactfully that it didn't matter in the least, *provided she got out of bed on the right side!* He wasn't far wrong. How often does increased piety lead to *uncreased* trousers and *decreased* amiability!

Talking about Anglo-Catholic churches, a friend who lives in a delightful village a few miles from here told me an amusing story.

The lovely old church has recently had a new rector, of whose very extreme tendencies the village people do not approve and they show their disapprobation by not going to church. My friend asked one old lady: "And do you too dislike poor Mr. — and his services?" "Well, no, mum," she answered. "Oi loikes a bit o' Roman Catholic, Oi does. When 'e antics, Oi antics, when 'e bows and scrapes, Oi does loikewise, but Oi jest can't aboide that there shawl as 'e dresses 'isself up in."

This reminds me of an old lady who, when the last General Election was in progress, was visited by the wife of the Conservative candidate. "Of course you are going to vote for my husband," said the lady. "No, mum," was the answer. "I was always brought up godly and I'm all for the Church, I am. I'm a-going to vote for the Communionist!"

Church-going is not the only distraction we have to offer; there are Bible-study groups, Cambridge Extension Lectures to keep us in touch with the latest developments in art and science, though most

of us still cling to the pictorial art of our youth, and highly disapprove of modern science with its upsetting discoveries and its vulgar passion for facts instead of fables. Then St. Mark's Church runs a choral society whose laudable efforts would be even more satisfactory than they are did not its women members so far outnumber the men and were the age limit of membership kept below sixty. After that age the voice is apt, alas, to have "a dying fall". "'Tis not so sweet now as it was before."

Above all, there is the bridge club. Here, again, age reigns supreme. On the last occasion on which I played there, only four men besides myself were present and their united years reached the respectable figure of three hundred and nine. One afternoon, just before Christmas, a very old lady arrived, shivering. "I have just been to the cemetery," she said, "to wish both my husbands a happy Christmas." Poor old ladies !

There are keen contests for the tiny stakes—threepence a hundred, and old women can be very catty. So, for the matter of that, can old men ! I was recently watching a rubber during which one lady absolutely threw away a game by her atrocious play. "What bad luck, partner !" she exclaimed cheerfully. "But I flatter myself I made every *possible* trick." Her partner remarked acidly : "I passed a very common funeral on my way here this afternoon."

"Oh, really. Whose was it?" said lady number one. "Your trumpeter's," was the reply.

Quite an excitement was caused a little while ago by two of the members—Mr. Sullivan, very large and very lame, and Mr. Salter, very small and very slight—both between seventy and eighty. The bridge room is in the basement, and the staircase narrow and steep. Mr. Sullivan, descending, slipped on the top step, and Mr. Salter, half-way up, instead of wisely skipping aside, rushed into the fray and nobly stretched out both arms in an effort to arrest the avalanche. As well might an Austin Seven try to stop a tank, or a Pekinese a mad elephant! Both old gentlemen arrived at the bottom of the stairs with a rush and lay there, a writhing, cursing heap. Arms, legs, and crutches were finally sorted out and they were stood on their feet, badly shaken but, fortunately, undamaged.

Once again I have been fortunate in my rooms. My landlord, who is employed in a club, looks after me, and his wife is a first-rate cook. They spend their lives cheerfully and happily, looking after others, and are, indeed, the salt of the earth, though I am afraid that St. Loyola knows them not, their religion being one of *service* rather than *services*. There is a daughter, an extremely pretty girl of eighteen whose charming love affair with a good-looking boy of seventeen is interesting me vastly. It goes on shamelessly, often

in my sitting-room when I am out or when conditions below stairs do not lend themselves to kissing. But kisses are merely an incident with the youthful lover. I have seen him interrupt the most passionate embraces to count his cigarette-cards.

The most important person in the house is Reginald, an amusing infant of thirteen, intelligent as a monkey and quite as cheeky. These irreverent young people do not treat me with the respect with which I was treated at Alexander Place. Reginald dabbles in electricity, and one day when putting my bell out of order, he warned me not to touch the wire. "Why not?" I said. "Cor', man," said Reginald, "it would give you a greater shock than your mother had when she first saw you!"

When I dine out I am always expected to bring him back some chocolates or salted almonds, which he loves, and one evening, as it was late, I thought I would put the offering where he would see it the first thing in the morning. Fancy waking up and eating chocolate creams before breakfast! As he was not quite asleep I placed them in his grubby little hand, and he looked such a baby that I insulted his thirteen-year-old dignity by kissing him good night. Such insults can be wiped out only by heavy damages. Reginald smiled dreamily and murmured: "That will cost you sixpence, please!"

Reginald has a friend named Dick of about the

same age. Their financial transactions are strange and difficult for an outsider to understand. I hear conversations of this description :

“You owe me fourpence.”

“No, I don’t. I gave you three ha’pence to make up your money at the pictures on Saturday, and half my chewing-gum.”

“Well, give me the twopence ha’penny.”

“I can’t. I’ll give you a penny and two fags.”

The two boys are curiously unlike each other in some ways. Reginald is a thorough little realist, very practical and quite satisfied with a world which, so far, has treated him very nicely, thank you ! Dick, a sweet-natured, rather imaginative child, is already wistfully anxious to know the meaning of life—if it has any meaning. I asked him last Christmas Eve if he was going to hang up his stocking. “I never believed in Santa Claus, *even when I was young*,” said Dick. And now he has his doubts about the Trinity ! They are very attractive, these “yong fresshe folk”, as Chaucer calls them. And queerly pathetic.

Alas ! I fear I shall soon have to find fresh quarters. The St. Loyola “fan” who occupies the drawing-room, objects to my playing the piano on Sunday. It would pay my landlady to advertise her house a “Home for Pious Spinsters—Hot and Cold Holy Water laid in every room. Incense ad lib.” !

Sometimes I miss the sunshine and gaiety of the

Riviera, but how much more bracing is a fine winter's day in England—where it more often than not means a biting east wind that pierces you to the bone—than the orange trees and olives of the degenerate South ! So character-making too.

But although this place was developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, when English taste—which died with the last of the Georges—was at its worst, it has its advantages. Nowhere in England do you get more sunshine, and a motor-bus will, in less than half an hour, whirl you away from the hideousness of the town itself to some of the most exquisite bits of old England. What foreign country can show you anything so lovely as the Sussex villages with their weather-beaten Norman churches and Gray's *Elegy* churchyards, their ancient inns and their cottages set in gardens gay with flowers ? Some of them, too, are still untouched by "progress"—Seddlescombe and Brede, for instance.

Not far off is the Romney Marsh country. Marshes have always had a strange fascination for me. I love the Lincolnshire fens and I should like Holland were it not—by one of the inscrutable dispensations of Providence—inhabited by the Dutch, a people whose mere proximity would drain the spirituality from the New Jerusalem itself. "Smith minor" was right when he described Holland as "a low lying country, damned all round" !

Very little of Romney Marsh is now marshland in the proper sense of the word. It has long been reclaimed from the sea and consists for the most part of level dyked pasture-land flecked with sheep and cattle, with here and there villages clustering round churches built centuries ago by the monks as, little by little, they drove back the hungry waves. The Marsh is about twenty miles long and varies in depth from three to eight miles. It is still a wild, lonely land, lovely at all times, but especially so when the setting sun is flooding it with red and gold and the silence is broken only by the cry of the curlew and the chattering of the gulls wheeling in from the sea. If you are of a philosophic turn of mind it is delightful to wander round the old churchyards, study the epitaphs and learn how the rustic moralist faced the inevitable hour.

Here is one I came across the other day on the tomb of a defunct blacksmith, aged seventy-seven :

My hammer and my anvil lie declined,
 My bellows, too, have lost their wind.
 My fire's extinct, my force decayed,
 And in the dust my vice is laid.
 My coal is spent, my iron is gone,
 My last nail hammered, my work is done.

At Brede there is an epitaph on a lad of seventeen who died in his glory and will "never be old" :

A lingering illness gave the silent blow,
The stroke was fatal, but the effect was slow.
With wasting pain, Death found him sore oppressed,
Pitied his sighs, and kindly gave him rest.*

As we are only about seventy miles from London—though the Southern Railway does its best to make it seem like a hundred—I can easily run up for a few days when I am tired of rural joys, see my friends, eat in my favourite restaurants, and hear my beloved Temple Church choir.

* Not far from Brede is that enchanting village Northiam, where the 18th century still lingers. There are some lovely old houses there and one of the most lovely is The Well House, half medieval, half Tudor. It has been modernized with rare skill by its owner, Mrs. Hawkes, who is as delightful as her house. She fills it at week-ends with interesting people. I have met there Doris Keane, Clare Sheridan, John Gielgud, Shane Leslie, and many others.

CHAPTER IX

MUSIC IN SOCIETY

SOCIETY—or rather that section of it which patronizes the arts and has its houses redecorated every few months—is taking up music ; the musical party is now definitely smart. Not the big pre-War affair with a *prima donna*, the latest fashionable fiddler, and an elaborate supper to restore musical enthusiasts exhausted with the intellectual effort of trying for a few moments to concentrate their attention on the programme so as not to mistake Mascagni for Mozart. We are asked to listen to string-quartettes, to recitals of German *lieder* or hefty German opera singers, and to Herr Schnabel in his most uncompromising mood.

A good deal of this musical fervour is due to Olga Lynne and her Aeolus Concerts. How accurately she has taken the measure of the smart and near-smart ! Who but Olga could induce the owners of the most desirable houses in London to lend them to her ; cram those houses to the doors with everyone who “counts”,

and make her victim stop talking for an hour while a severe programme of classical and modern music is being performed? More than half the audience know nothing about music and cares less, but many of them have managed to pick up a few of the *clichés* which are the stock-in-trade of the musical amateur. It is interesting to watch their faces. Intense boredom, resignation, and indifference struggle with the endeavour to look intelligent and—with those who feel that women as well as men may rise on stepping-stones—the satisfaction of knowing that they are doing the right thing.

“How I *loathe* highbrow people and highbrow music,” Mrs. Richard Guinness was heard to remark at one of the concerts. At another the “Orina Madrigal Singers” had included the “Londonderry Air” dished up with some rather modern harmonies. “Ah,” said a lady to her neighbours, “some *real* music at last! But what a lot of wrong notes they are singing!”

Perhaps none of them would give themselves away quite so delightfully as did a now leading American hostess. In her early days in London, when she was still singing “Excelsior” she told me she “just *lived*” for Wagner. “And which of his operas do you like best?” said I. “Well,” she answered, “I think *Tristan and Isolde* (pronounced Eyesolder), with *Oberammergau* a good second.”

After all, one cannot help feeling that sometimes

Olga is not playing the game ! Very few people—above all, society women—really like ultra-modern music. A friend of mine told me that she once sat next to Lord Snowden at a musical party at which a composition of Schönberg was played. “Do you like that ?” she asked him. “Like it !” said Snowden. “I think it is worse than the *Well of Loneliness* !”

However, the Sitwells, who are nothing if not up to date, have taken modern music under their protection, so that the people that walked in darkness need do so no longer. But sad to relate there are those who still love darkness rather than light. Doubtless because their deeds are evil. I recently, at a party, heard one of these Philistines disputing with one of Sacheverell’s admirers his claim to immortality. “But,” said the lady, “his prose is so exquisitely lyric.” “Yes, Lyric Hammersmith,” was the reply !

It is not only in society that music is ceasing to be the Cinderella of the arts. Musical taste among the masses has improved enormously. Against this must be set the fact that of the hundreds of people who write to the B.B.C. 95 per cent complain that too much serious music is broadcast and ask for more rubbish. The same proportion holds good with regard to the sale of gramophone records. Who, however, twenty years ago, would have ventured to predict that Bach would ever become a best-seller ? This improvement is due to a variety of causes, among others, Sir Henry

Wood's admirable Promenade Concerts, the gramophone, and the B.B.C.

Mrs. Samuel Courtauld, too, did invaluable work in giving the best music interpreted by the greatest performers at prices within the means of the large class of music-lovers of small means. The Concert Club was a splendid idea. Mrs. Courtauld was a great woman who dreamed great dreams and she had the means to make her dreams come true. Her place will not easily be filled. She was always a very good friend to me, and to everyone on whom she bestowed her friendship. She *made* Dr. Malcolm Sargent, whose tragic breakdown in health occurred so soon after her death, and the enormous vogue of Herr Schnabel is entirely due to her. Personally I don't care much for Schnabel ; in my opinion he is so dull and didactic, but then the pianoforte music of *his* two musical gods, Beethoven and Schubert, bores me, and I do not like the way he plays the music of *my* deities—Bach and Chopin.

Mr. Robert Mayer is another enthusiastic music-lover who backs his fancy freely. His wife, too, is an excellent musician and sings admirably. The "children's concerts" are doing a great work in civilizing the children of the rich and raising up new and intelligent supporters for the art. They are getting so fashionable that I fear it will soon be impossible for people who cannot show at least four quarterings

to gain admittance for their offspring ! Little Princess Elizabeth was once taken to one of them. When it was over, Mr. Mayer and Dr. Sargent were duly presented to Her Royal Highness, and she was asked if she had enjoyed herself. "Very much indeed," she replied courteously ; "*but I would rather have been asked to tea.*"

In spite of the heroic efforts of concert-givers to popularize the works of Schöenber, Stravinsky, and the more uncompromising of the moderns, I am afraid that the majority of music-lovers will still cling to music they can understand. When a new Beethoven arises they will take him to their hearts as they are now taking Bach, and as they will eventually adopt any music that is sincere, sane, and vital—music that is born, not made.

When Stravinsky tells us that romance is dead he is talking sheer nonsense, and if, by the way, his *Symphonie des Psaumes* is typical of what religion suggests to Soviet Russia, I am not surprised that the Russians have given up God !

The best music of all periods has always been romantic and always will be. Bach was as romantic in his day as was Schumann a hundred and fifty years later. Again, no composer of any worth ever tried to break wholly with the past ; his music is a development, gaining richness and dignity from a proper—not servile—use of traditional methods, and

freshness and originality from the vitality of its matter and the sympathy of its creator with the outlook and ideals of the times in which he lives.

Design, music *must* have, and the lack of it will, I think, prevent much of Delius's music from achieving long life and a genuine place in the affections of the musical public, notwithstanding his genius. Many of his compositions are so atmospheric and vague that there seems no reason why they began or why they should come to an end. You could easily take whole pages from some of his works and insert them in others without its making any perceptible difference. And they are too long. It is the swift passing of a sunset that charms us into melancholy. If it lasted for three quarters of an hour it would lose its fascination.

A good deal of Elgar's music ought to—and will—live, but notwithstanding Ernest Newman's powerful advocacy, an Elgar programme does not yet fill the Queen's Hall. Speaking of Newman, I wish he would forget Wagner's wives and washing-bills for a while and write in the amusing way that is so characteristic of him and that made him so much more readable than any of the other musical critics. Ernest is getting every day more obsessed with the importance of being earnest in his old age. Alas, all his endeavours to become so only make him *less Ernest*! But he is a splendid champion of his musical gods—Wagner, Elgar, and

Beecham ; indeed, it is largely through him that Sir Thomas has at last come into his own. He is a musical genius and as great a conductor as any of the foreign celebrities over whom the silly public loses its head. Furtwangler compared with him is nothing but an orchestral drill sergeant or a *maître de ballet*.

There is an amusing story told of the late Sir Joseph Beecham (the father of Thomas) by a lady whose "backstairs" influence—so rumour has it—had helped him to obtain his title. She called at his house one day and found him busily engaged with a dancing-mistress. He had been told, he said, that everyone who received a baronetcy was required to attend a Court Ball and dance a minuet with the Queen.

Apropos of Beecham, many of the Continental celebrities—especially those of the Teutonic variety—have a supreme contempt for all British music and British musicians.

This caused one of them, a distinguished pianist, to be rather neatly scored off at a party in London. Said he : "The English musician is not worth the clothes he stands up in." There was general consternation at his exceeding frankness, and someone then asked if he did not consider Beecham a fine conductor. "Oh, Beecham !" he answered. "What is he beside Bruno Walter, or Stokowsky, the greatest of all conductors ?" He had delivered himself like a sheep

to the shearer, for he was, of course, at once informed that Stokowsky was a born Londoner, that his real name was Leonard Stokes, and that he was once a London choirboy. Like Peter, he went out and wept bitterly : at any rate, he went !

The idea that a foreign name helps a musician caused that excellent conductor, Basil Cameron, who is now in charge of the San Francisco Orchestra, a great deal of trouble. Before the War he had changed his name—and to Hidenberg, of all names ! He had the greatest difficulty in satisfying the authorities that he was English through and through and in avoiding internment.

I wonder, by the way, if Germans will ever learn how to dress. I attended some rehearsals of *The Ring* at Covent Garden last summer and was shocked to the soul by the garments some of the operatic stars wore. I would undergo the tortures of the Inquisition or eat things out of a tin rather than be seen in them. The German Opera season, however, is never very brilliant socially. Women seem to wear their worst clothes when they listen to Wagner—probably out of sympathy for Brünhilde. How loyal the Wagner enthusiasts are ! Year after year they sit through *The Ring*, many of them going to Munich or Bayreuth later to hear it all over again.

The late American Ambassador, General Dawes, was an amateur musician. He entirely lacked the

social gifts usually possessed by diplomats of the older civilizations and his staff complained bitterly of his lack of geniality and hospitality towards them. But he had his weak point. He once composed a piece called "Melody in A", and the surest way to his favour for the junior members of the Embassy to take was to be heard casually humming it. One of them, who was not blessed with a musical ear, worked hard to learn it and when he thought he was note-perfect, tried it on his chief, who merely growled : "What the hell are you making that damned noise for?"

It is curious how fond people are of trying to appear musical ; there is, I think, more nonsense talked about music than there is about any of the arts. People who are quite frank about most of their likes and dislikes are afraid to say that they do not like music lest they should be considered uncultured. And yet to very many quite intelligent beings it is nothing but a meaningless noise. If you cannot be hypercritical there is no need to be hypocritical ! Very few people are as frank as old Lord Huntley, who, at an evening party at Lord Glentanars', when Borovsky was playing Liszt's transcription of Bach's organ "Fugue in A Minor", said to me, "If that fellow *must* play the piano, why on earth doesn't he give us a tune?"

Borovsky, by the way, has forgotten more about Bach than most pianists ever knew, but his English is

not on a par with his playing. A little while ago I received a letter from him telling me that he had been engaged to give some "curses" (courses) to pianists at the Conservatoire of Copenhagen—a branch of instruction far too much neglected at our own schools of music. He went on to say that he would shortly be coming to London to give some Bach recitals, and that he was afraid the tickets would not have a "good sail" owing to the depressed conditions in England. I replied that the waves of depression, however high, could not possibly wreck *his* barque.

Borovsky is very intelligent. I once asked him how it was that Bach is the only composer—with the exception of the early *Clavecinistes*—with whom the music of Chopin seems at home. He said that the reason is because the harmony of both composers is so marvellously rich and their fertility of invention so great. They are the aristocrats of music.

The financial crisis has had one good effect ; it has brought down the fees of operatic stars both here and in America. I suppose the best-paid performer in the world is now the wonderful young violinist Menuhin ; he was paid £2500 for making a record of the Elgar Concerto, and if the record succeeds in placing that superb work in its proper place, which is among the half-dozen violin concertos, he will have earned the money.

I am afraid the rank and file of the musical profession are having a very bad time. How do they live? Those of them who, like that talented violinist Madame Beatrice Langley, have forsaken music for business, may—even in these hard times—count themselves fortunate. Madame Langley is now Madame Thamar, and her admirable beauty parlours in Beauchamp Place and in Bond Street deserve their great success.

In spite of all difficulties and the overcrowded condition of the musical profession, the various schools of music are full of pupils. The Royal College students are lucky, as their principal, Sir Hugh Allen, takes such an enormous interest in them personally. He seems to hear before anyone else of any job that is going, and manages to secure it for a college pupil. As for the B.B.C., he has them in his pocket. Allen is one of the most vivid and interesting personalities I have ever come across. He is one of those men whose presence you feel in a room before you know he is there. I ventured to criticize his literary taste in *I Hope They Won't Mind*. He didn't mind and I was duly grateful.

Successful musicians are generally happy, optimistic men. No wonder. To be paid handsomely for what you most enjoy doing and which you are convinced—musicians being a modest race—that you can do better than anyone else, is an ideal state of

affairs. I envy optimistic people ; they are generally both good-tempered and courageous. Take Weingartner, the celebrated conductor, who at over seventy has taken unto himself a third wife. Most of us would call this asking for trouble. Germans, however, are generally fairly easy-going so long as they get enough beer. Not so Italian tenors ; the famous Beniamino Gigli, for instance, needs careful handling. Once in New York he objected to singing "Rhadames" to the "Aïda" of a very stout *prima donna*. He stamped his foot and cried, "I vill not *sin* vis zat voman !"

Notwithstanding the enormous development of mechanical music and the present craze for it, it can never really satisfy the genuine music-lover. Music heard on the gramophone or the wireless bears about the same relation to the actual performance as does a coloured print to the picture reproduced. It is like making love by telephone.

What a thrill a really great performance can give one ! I can remember three that took me completely out of myself and which will always remain gracious and treasured memories. One was Kreisler in his great days one evening at the Queen's Hall, playing Beethoven's Concerto. I have never heard him play with such inspiration before or since. Another was Nordica and Caruso in *Aïda* at Covent Garden some twenty-five years ago, and the third was Brahms' Requiem at the Temple Church on a terribly wet

Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1931. On each of those occasions I was intensely conscious of a magnetic current running between the performers and the listeners ; a feeling of tense excitement. But such thrills are rare experiences.

CHAPTER X

GIVE US A TUNE

AM I boring you by talking so much about music ? When once I begin on the subject I never know when to stop. *C'est plus fort que moi*. I know, of course, that music cannot compare in interest with a League match, or the flight of some intrepid female over Tooting Common, but, after all, it is my own subject—"shop", if you like, and at least I understand something about the goods I keep in stock.

Why is it that in these days when we all pride ourselves on our musical culture and from morning to night can follow more or less intelligently the B.B.C. skipping lightly from Bach's cantatas to "The Monastery Garden", that none of our composers seem capable of writing a tune ? It is years since we have had one that has completely caught the ear of the public and that has been sung and whistled by everyone and played by every conceivable instrument and combination of instruments from the Jew's harp to the grand orchestra.

There is a class that knows not Bach and Stravinsky

and that does not frequent the Queen's Hall, and I feel that it is being neglected. I mean the youthful population who once upon a time were wont to beg us to "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and to tell the Daisy of their dreams how sweet she would look on the seat of a "Bicycle made for Two". Such melodies helped to speed young footsteps while engaged in such useful but unexciting occupations as delivering groceries at the back door or telegrams at the front, and in the now almost prehistoric Victorian and Edwardian times they sprang eternal in the brain of the composer. I can just remember the 80's when Sullivan's "Sweethearts", "Dream Faces", "Nancy Lee", and "Love's Old Sweet Song"—this last still popular—were the rage. Everyone of middle age can go back to the songs of Chevalier, "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road" and "My Old Dutch". Later on we had, among others, "Dolly Grey" and the delightful "Honeysuckle and the Bee"; but since the 1916 "If You were the Only Girl in the World" nothing has achieved a like success, for who can remember the jazz "tunes" of even last year?

The fact is, the art of writing melody seems to have been lost ; the composers of popular music are suffering from the same form of musical influenza as are the young gentleman who, with the aid of all the modern tricks of orchestration, turn out atmospheric sketches called "The Garden of Proserpine",

"Dinner Hour in the Dockyard", and so on. And the former are in a far more parlous state, for they are *expected* to write tunes, while your young modern writer would immediately put his head in the gas oven were he to discover the ghost of one in his "Dockyard".

Now, there is nothing disgraceful in melody. The works of the so-called classical composers, from Palestrina to Wagner, are full of it and that is why they continue to hold their place in our affections, for even those of us—I might say *especially* those of us—who are the most cultured and the best-educated musically, crave for melody in addition to the other qualities that go to make good music. Why do Gilbert and Sullivan operas still fill the theatre with old *and* young people? Not because of Gilbert's plots, witty and ingenious as they are, but because of Sullivan's immortal tunes. And apart from these operas, what musical comedy of recent years has contained such infectious and delightful music as the *Belle of New York*, *The Geisha*, and *San Toy*? The last revue I went to see was *Words and Music*. From the beginning to end there was not a single tune that lingered in my memory.

Probably the long reign of jazz has had more to do with the drying up of the fountain of melody than anything else. All jazz tunes are exactly alike. Thank goodness there are distinct signs that the vogue of the

American negro with his raucous voice and his eternal retchings about his mammy, and his home in Kentucky or wherever it is, is waning. Here is the refrain of a song I recently heard at a cinema :

Yes, yes, my darling said yes, yes ;
I'm glad she said yes, yes,
Instead of no, no !

"Sick-making", as the Bright Young People were wont to remark.

Another reason is the decline of the Music Hall, a form of entertainment which I personally found far more amusing than the present-day revues, which certainly do not seem to produce artists equal to, let us say, Chevalier, Dan Leno, Little Tich, Malcolm Scott, Vesta Tilley, and the inimitable Marie Lloyd.

The type of "popular" music—like everything else—changes, but a good tune is untouched by the injuries of time. The other day at a friend's house I came across a drawerful of old music—chiefly popular songs of the 80's. Among them was Sullivan's "The Chorister", a type of ballad that was once highly popular. It evoked in me the half-amused, half-wistful regret that one feels on coming across one of those frosted Christmas cards we so loved when we were children, or an old school exercise-book. "The Chorister", a hopelessly sentimental ditty, is

decorated with the picture of a rather fat choirboy with the whites of his eyes turned up. The first verse runs :

O soft and dim the light and shade across the cloisters stealing,
I heard the grand old organ played, the anthem upward pealing.
One boy's sweet voice above the rest, I heard so clearly ringing.
The angels must his dreams have bless'd to teach him such
sweet singing.

In the second verse we are told that :

His earnest eyes to heaven were raised with yearning pure
and lowly,
To follow where his singing went and join the angels holy.

"No gentle mother's love" had the poor child, and it was quite a relief when, in the third verse, he died to a harp-like accompaniment—organ *ad lib.* !

Singing in the "Old Cathedral" or in the village choir must have been a terribly lethal job in the days of Sir Arthur Sullivan ; no blue-eyed treble had a chance. Fortunately being a choirboy has ceased to be numbered among the dangerous occupations.

There were a surprising number of really good tunes among the old songs, and they inspired me with the curiosity to see what was happening in London musical circles in the far-off 70's, particularly in the year in which I myself made my bow to a world

which has hitherto been singularly unappreciative of the gift I bestowed upon it by being born. So I hied me to the British Museum to consult the *Daily Telegraph*, then—as always—the best-informed, and the most interesting paper with regard to matters musical.

The *Daily Telegraph* of September 14, 1873, was a considerably smaller journal than that of today, and a far duller one. There were no startling headlines that gave you a *résumé* of the more exciting news ; the leading articles, though well enough written, were of portentous length and solemnity and one looked in vain for the pages devoted to women. There were no thrilling descriptions of Lady So-and-so's new bathroom, nor were we told how she was dressed and fed her children or that when the writer last saw her "she had on wide trousers of bright sealing-wax-red serge with bell-bottoms" !

Advertisements were small and matter-of-fact, but I turned green with envy at the cheapness of things. You could go to New York—if you suffered from morbid curiosity—for £15, first class. You could hire a large bedroom with use of sitting-room for eight shillings a week in Thavies Inn ; old brandy cost four-and-sixpence a bottle, and vintage claret could be had at forty-eight shillings a dozen. The London Exhibition was holding a course of cookery, and made a feature of shilling dinners.

Here is the menu advertised on the day I was born :

Leek Soup.

Stewed Eels with Haricot Beans and Onions.

Apple Tart.

I dined better on my last birthday. The great sensation of the day was the Tichborne trial, but *revenons à nos moutons*.

The Crystal Palace concerts under Mr. August Manns were in full swing. Sir Julius Benedict was playing Mr. Sterndale Bennett's new sonata the "Maid of Orleans". Among the soloists engaged for the season were Mesdames Patey and Lemmens and Messrs. Sims Reeves, Foli, von Bulow, and Joachim. Promenade concerts were being held at Covent Garden, and the attraction offered for the evening in question was a "Swiss Air" with variations for the solo members of the orchestra. There was a "Bijou Choir of Boys"—alas, the long long years since their voices broke ! Perhaps, like Sullivan's "Chorister", they "sing among the angels now". A ballad concert was advertised, and the songs included "Tom Bowling", "Rock me to Sleep", and the "Minstrel Boy".

So both the cultured and the uncultured music-lover were well provided for ; but then as now the lover of good music was a *rara avis* in proportion to the

population. There is, however, no doubt that the general level of musical taste in England is infinitely higher today than it was when I came into the world.

Perhaps, after all, there is now *too* great a desire to educate people. Those whose natural taste runs in this direction of the—so-called—classical music, have never had any difficulty in indulging it, and there is no earthly reason why they should endeavour to bring up others in the way—they think—they should go. Far too much music is written ; above all, dull, unwanted music. I would give the whole output of most of our composers for a few such tunes as the “Barcarole” from “Les Contes d’Hoffmann”, the “Londonderry Air”, or almost any of the best numbers in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

In this connection let me be frankly Philistine and say how much I regret that Elgar did not devote more of his attention to light music. He had a genius for writing tunes—“Salut d’Amour”, the “Pomp and Circumstance Marches”, and those delightful suites, for instance. We have enough symphonies and oratorios. I often attend the concerts at the White Rock Pavilion, Hastings, given by that very talented conductor Julius Harrison and his admirable orchestra. The extremely comfortable sofas are generally full of old ladies who either knit or slumber peacefully during the symphonies, indeed, the hall looks like the

“Garden of Sleep”, and the poor old ladies look as if they were intoxicated with stout. But they wake up for Elgar’s “Wand of Youth”.

Hastings gets a lot of good music. I recently heard the Carl Rosa Company—who struggle on so bravely in spite of neglect and ingratitude in London—give a surprisingly good performance of “Don Giovanni”. And to the everlasting credit of Hastings, the hall was packed.

CHAPTER XI

YOUTH

THE young people of today seem to have a peculiarly irritating effect on old men. Elderly colonels and their like write indignant letters to the papers about them. I am constantly asked what *I* think of them. As if it mattered *what* the old think of the young ! It would be far more to the purpose to ask what the young think of the old ! As Verdi said when he was eighty : "Heaven preserve us all from the judgments of old men !" Their opinion, I am afraid, would not be very complimentary, for the old have made a terrible mess of things. It was their muddling and indecision that drove us into war and, curiously enough, that ghastly experience seems to have taught them nothing. When recently the Oxford Union went pacifist, all the retired officers saw red. "I'd stick 'em all up against a wall and shoot 'em," I heard a bloodthirsty old major remark.

These youths have to face a very different existence from the happy, care-free one which was the heritage

of the young in the prosperous pre-War period. They have been born into trouble. What wonder if they are serious, disillusioned, and refuse to accept as gospel the cheap jingoism of the military clique? Patric Balfour, who in *Society Racket* analyses them with such subtle skill, calls them "hard". Perhaps they may appear so, but the hardness is in reality only superficial; an armour to protect them in the strenuous fight they have to wage against the complications of modern life.

The young think things out far more than they used to in my generation and they begin to think very early. Pater, writing before the deluge, spoke of this capacity for thinking which is inherent in them :

They are at play, indeed, in the sun [he says], but a little cloud passes over it now and then; and just because of them, because they are there, the whole aspect of the place is chilled suddenly beyond what one could have thought possible into what seems, nevertheless, to be the proper and permanent light of day. For though they pass on from age to age, the type of what is pleasantest to look on, which as type is indeed eternal it is, of course, but for an hour that it rests with any one of them individually. Assuredly they have no malady of soul any more than of the body. *Animi sensus non expressit*. But if they are not yet thinking, there is the capacity of thought, of painful thought in them, as they seem to be aware wistfully.*

A charming feature in the young of today is their

* "The Age of Athletic Prize Men".

exceeding frankness. Boys of my generation generally said not what they thought, but what they imagined their elders expected them to think. This is amusingly illustrated by a sort of *questionnaire* on things in general which was recently given to the boys in a school which a youthful friend of mine attends. One of the questions was to this effect. "If by pressing a button you could cause a man to fall dead, and receive £20,000 for doing so, would you press the button?" Every boy answered yes. Some said they would do it for much less ; one young gentleman even owned that he would gladly do it for the price of a new bike which he coveted.

Now, when I was at school, we should have all felt exactly as these boys felt about it, but we should not have dared to say so. Well aware of what was expected of us, we should have answered—little hypocrites that we were—that murder was murder, whether we killed with our own hands or by pressing a button ; that God would be angry with us if we broke the Sixth Commandment ; that money thus obtained would leave a curse, and so on. And the boy who dared tell the truth would have received a severe moral lecture.

Another thing about the young which is delightful is their friendliness towards those of their elders who know their place. They are delightful companions. The other day I asked a young Oxford man the reason

of their attitude. "Oh," he said, "life isn't much of a catch for the young or the old. You are sixty now, and I shall be sixty before I know where I am ; that is, if I am not killed in some silly and futile war."

Never having been in a hurry in my life I find it a little difficult to understand the passion of the young for speed. Their cars must be as fast and expensive as they can—or cannot—possibly afford—their women friends faster and still more expensive ! I do not think that young men are so anxious to find rich wives as they used to be. Motoring and flying interest them far more than marriage.

There is now no such thing as an occupation which is *infra dig.* so long as it affords a living. Let us hope that the day will arrive when—as in old China—the only degrading profession will be that of the Army. Offices, shops, garages, are besieged with public-school boys clamouring for jobs. Toby O'Brien, that brilliant young journalist who writes for the *Daily Telegraph*, told me that a friend of his who was at Oxford the year he was President of the Union came to his mother's house the other day selling brushes on commission, and a woman I know was called on by an ex-Eton boy trying to get orders for silk stockings. The Police Force attracts many. Passing the Tower last summer at a time when it was closed to visitors, I asked a young policeman if, by sending my card to the Governor, he thought I could get in—I had

not visited it since I was a child. He answered in the most Oxford of voices : "Oh, er, no, quite definitely —no !"

But journalism is the ambition of most of them. Derek Patmore—the charming grandson of the poet—told me that the Fleet Street bars at lunch-time were as full of young Oxford and Cambridge men as the "Mitre" or the "Bull".

As for the morals of the young, they are no worse than at any other period ; probably a good deal better. They certainly drink a good deal, but they don't gamble to any great extent, and if they are somewhat promiscuous in their love affairs it is the fault of the women who lead them on. Never believe it when you read in the newspapers of a boy of seventeen seducing a girl ; it is almost invariably the other way about. And then comes the wretched marriage which is so often wrecked in a year or two. It was a Frenchman, who, disliking the smell of cosmetics, described marriage as "*des mauvaises humeurs pendant la journée et des mauvaises odeurs pendant la nuit*" ! The young are constantly told that they should "look before they leap". Alas ! If a young woman gets hold of them they haven't a chance to look or leap.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid !

A favourite accusation against them is that of

being effeminate. As a friend of mine remarked, "How untrue proverbs are !" "Boys will be boys", for instance. So many of them nowadays insist on being girls !

Undoubtedly a good deal of this sort of thing goes on, but not more than in other countries and not so much as in Germany which is a hot-bed of exotic sex-perversion. There was far more of it at the end of the seventeenth century, both in France and in England. In the *Letters of Madame* we read how extraordinarily prevalent it was in French and English society. "Only the lower classes now make love to women," she writes. The abnormal, however, are never in any country more than a small minority.

Though very few of the young today profess any religion it is not because they are definitely anti-religious—indeed, many of them are acutely conscious of the spiritual bankruptcy of the world—but they cannot accept dogmatic Christianity. And how you are to accept Christianity without dogma is beyond me. One rather wonders where the Church will stand in another fifty years. Hardly any of the younger generation—or their parents—ever enter a church unless it be for a wedding or a memorial service. But whatever happens to the Churches nothing can ever affect the validity of the Christian ethics, and as, without some standard of morality and general conduct we should all of us soon relapse into barbarism,

I suppose the accepted creeds will sooner or later adapt themselves to changed conditions and modern thought.

Modern youth, you will perhaps say, does not consist only of young men, there is the female sex to be considered. Frankly, I find the girls of today far less interesting than their brothers. They all seem to look, talk, and think exactly alike. Many of them have given up every feminine pursuit except that of trying to catch men. They are equally indifferent to art, music, or literature, and seem to exist solely for pleasure. Dress, cocktail parties, dances, sport, and love-making fill their lives. And their blood-red fingernails—so like talons—suggest the birds of prey which so many of them really are. It would be interesting to know who set the fashion of tinting the nails. The Creole women do so in order to hide the bluish half-moons which betray their race.

These women are less gracious specimens of their sex than some of the elderly ladies of a more unhurried age, many of whom are happily still with us. And how they love advertisement ! Well, they have their uses ; they provide well-paid jobs for Lords Donegall, Castlerosse, and many other men and women who have to earn their livings !

It is curious how great an interest—even in these days—people take in the doings of “society”. For some time I wrote weekly notes on men’s topics for

the *Passing Show* : it was before that paper changed its policy and went in for being a "story" magazine. I gave details of the latest changes in the shape of dress-coats, what to wear at Ascot, where to lunch and what to see ; everything, in fact, that concerned the life of the fashionable young man.

To judge by the scores of letters I received from my readers I should think that most of them bought their clothes ready-made and paid for them by instalments. One young gentleman who confessed to having reached the mature age of sixteen and to earning ten shillings a week in a City office, wrote to ask if I could put him on to a West End tailor who would give him credit as he was so tired of wearing cheap ready-made suits. Poor kid ! I should have loved to buy him some nice clothes—boys of that age take a natural delight in looking smart—but I had to reply with due severity, using all the sententious platitudes which "grown-ups" keep on tap for unregenerate youth. Strange that people who probably live in dull suburbs, work at dull jobs, and whose only restaurant is a Lyons' tea shop, should enjoy reading about Savile Row and the Embassy Club : but so it is.

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CHAPTER XII

REALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE !

THE very rich—I mean those who never do anything so low as to ride in buses or travel third class and who rarely come into personal contact with what the Socialist papers call the “proletariat”—miss a good deal. You cannot get to know your fellow human creatures if you are segregated from them behind a barrage of luxurious town and country houses, Rolls-Royce cars, reserved compartments when you condescend to take the train, and an army of obsequious secretaries and domestics. Unless, too, you have a keen sense of humour, you almost inevitably end by applauding the wisdom of Providence in making you, *you* ; and if, perchance, you happen to meet someone who refuses to take you at your own valuation, you are very annoyed indeed.

The more intelligent members of Royal Families are apt to feel this drawback very keenly. In the days of my youth I knew a member of our Royal Family who died when still a young man, and he often

talked to me on the subject. "No one ever tells me the truth," he said to me one day. "Do you know that I have never in my life been called a damned fool ; My most idiotic remarks are listened to with respect ; my most foolish jokes received with 'counterfeited glee', and men of twice my age and with five times my brains call me 'Sir'. At school," he went on to say, "it was the same thing. I was always being praised by the masters and the sons of rich nobodies 'sucked up' to me. I am sick of the whole business." "But, *Sir*," I answered ; on which he threw a book at me, "don't you get a little plain speaking from your own family ?" "Yes," he replied ; "but we all quarrel, so that it doesn't count. Anyhow, we ain't a very bright lot !"

His greatest pleasure was to go to the rooms of a friend, a well-known singer, change into an old suit and worn boots, and with a greasy cap on his head and a coloured handkerchief twisted round his neck go down to dockland, drink in the pubs, and attend an East End music hall. I too am intensely curious about the lives of other people, though I am content to study them west of Whitechapel. I expect they are much the same everywhere.

You can get a lot of fun in the summer by frequenting the parks and, above all, by making friends with the children. Whether they are the well-dressed, well-looking-after children of the rich, or the hardy

little adventurers from the poor streets, they are always fascinating, and so friendly. The poor children are, I think, more joyous, as they have no elders to interfere with them. One of the pleasantest parks in London, though practically unknown to the fashionable world of today, is Battersea Park. It was there that I witnessed one evening last summer a most exciting, but wholly unadvertised, sporting event ; nothing less, indeed, than a match between England and Australia !

The rules of the M.C.C. were not strictly adhered to, and the "elevens" were somewhat incomplete. The English team consisted of four young gentlemen of tender years, captained by "'Obbs", an angelic-looking infant of some ten summers, while the Australians mustered three only ; but then, their captain was all of twelve years old. I liked his shock of red hair, his merry blue eyes, and alert, cheeky little swagger.

The bat—like true sportsmen the rival "elevens" shared it—belonged, as was only right and proper, to "'Obbs", the ball being the property of one of his men, who owed his inclusion in the team to its possession, his age being but seven. A stick covered with a rather soiled little jacket served as a wicket. It was a noisy game but scrupulously fair ; the ginger-headed Australian captain, whose name, by the way, was Alf, saw to that. I am glad to say,

however, that he tempered mercy with justice, for when the tiny owner of the ball was given out "leg before" ("leg before" !—rather the whole little body), and lifted up his voice and wept at the indignity, he generously conceded another innings.

After a time I suggested refreshments, and never was an invitation accepted with more shy alacrity. Most of the players chose lumps of a rather repulsive-looking, but extremely solid, cake washed down with "ginger ile". They were charmingly polite, and the hearty "Thank you, sir" when we parted was a great deal more sincere than the "Thanks *so* much for a delightful evening" of the more conventional social function.

What a jolly place is Battersea Park ! I like the family parties camped under a tree or near the fence, minding young Alf's bike while he plays cricket. Father, tired with his day's work, takes off his coat, makes a cushion of it and settles down to the evening paper. Mother produces biscuits and sweets from her bag for the little ones. "Goodness gracious !" she cries. "There you are with your 'ands as black as black again. I never seen such a child !" Father looks up from his paper and says, "Well, Ma, you was the same when you was young. It all comes off in the wash." They are very kindly, these simple souls, and courteous to everyone—the courtesy that springs from goodness of heart and innate breeding. And it is all so English.

The shadows of the tall elms lengthen across the level grass and twilight is draining the colour from the flowers. It is time to go home to that little home—one of thousands like it. To keep it going Father works hard for fifty weeks of the year, and Mother works even harder to keep the family clean, tidy, and well fed. "Come on, young Alf, or you won't get no supper. 'Ere, Gladys, take the basket; your ma's tired." . . . And so another day is over. Another of the leaves of life has fallen.

It is extraordinary how thoroughly at home poor children are in the London streets. A little while ago, when "nicely dressed all in my best" I was on my way to lunch at my beloved Quaglino's, I was stopped in St. James's Street by the leader of a band of five incredibly dirty little people who asked me: "Is this the West End, guv'nor?" "It is," say I. "What do you think of it?" "A bit of orl roight," said he. He told me that they had walked all the way from the wilds of Camden Town. As it was so near lunch-time, I offered a shilling to buy some chocolates, but with sturdy, though very polite, independence he refused it, saying, "No, thank you, sir; we don't want no money." However, I persuaded one young gentleman whose face fell at this spartan rigour, to accept the coin, and we parted.

Children are extraordinarily good company if they feel at home with you. During the last Christmas

holidays I took a small boy of some twelve summers, who was up from the country for the day, to lunch at Leoni's and then to the play. Feeling that I needed support for the coming ordeal, I ordered caviar (for myself). When it arrived, the little chap looked at it curiously, and with the deplorable lack of respect of present-day youth said: "What's that, old bean—stewed shot?"

The Cockney youth is very quick-witted. I once at the Marble Arch listened to a rather unprepossessing gentleman who, I gathered, could do away with unemployment in a few months, were he made Prime Minister. He deplored the double-dealing of the Cabinet. "I don't 'old with crookedness," he told us. "I sez what I means. I ain't got two faces." "That's roight, mister; if you 'ad, you wouldn't 'a come out with that one!" cried a boyish voice from the crowd.

Another amusing incident was a group of lads quarrelling. One of them had lost a shilling and was making insinuations against the honesty of another. "I don't say as you took it," said he, "but I think I should 'a' found it *if you 'adn't 'elped me look for it!*"

Mrs. Russell, the mother of that clever young violoncellist Sheridan Russell, told me that on the fifth of November last year when he was walking home from the Wigmore Hall with his instrument under his arm, a small boy kept asking him for "a penny for the Goi, sir". He refused two or three times, and

then, as the boy wouldn't go away, said : "It's no good ; I'm in a bad temper, and, besides which, I'm a Jew." The little fellow looked up at him and said sympathetically : "Did yer play rotten ?" He got his penny.

A year or two ago I used to go down to Bethnal Green every week to help a woman I know who runs a club for small boys there. About sixty children of from seven to ten years turned up, all very poor and many of them very dirty. But how charming and amusing they were and such little sports. I enjoyed those afternoons immensely, and felt, too, that I was perhaps helping to amuse our future legislators. One day a rather pompous clergyman came to visit us, and wishing to be genial, said to one of the boys : "I wonder what your name is, my lad ; let me see if I can guess. Is it Augustus ?" "Garn !" answered the boy. "My name's 'Enry." "Ah, I was wrong," said the clergyman. "Now let me see if you can guess mine ?" The boy looked him up and down and gave the inimitable answer, "*Disgustus !*"

Just one more street-boy anecdote which was told me by a friend who saw the incident. A magnificent Rolls-Royce stopped suddenly by the pavement in a poor street off the Edgware Road, where three or four dirty little boys were playing. The chauffeur opened the door and a very smart lady enveloped in expensive furs got out, embraced one of the boys,

pressed a pound note into his hand and drove off quickly. "Lor' ! 'Oo's yer lydy friend ?" said another of them. "'Er? That's my ruined sister," was the reply.

Children of that class have a much readier wit than the children of the rich. I suppose the freedom of the streets gives it to them. The small schoolboy, however, lets himself go in his examination papers. It would be difficult to beat some of "Master Malaprop's" statements as recorded in the Harrow School Magazine. "The Pope sent Luther a Papal Legate," he tells us, "but he tore it up and never read it." We learn, too, why God gave Moses tables of stone on which to write the Commandments. "The Israelites were always breaking God's laws, so he wrote them on two tables of stone, which could not be broken." "Pompei" it appears, "was overwhelmed by an irruption of saliva from the Vatican."—Italian in its habits, even at that early date !

Speaking of Italy reminds me of a woman I know who is very keen on Italian art. One day she took her little girl to the National Gallery and showed her the primitives. "Who are these people in dressing-gowns holding bits of palm trees ?" said the child.

"They are martyrs, dear."

"And who are the ladies in white with banjos, Mummy ?"

"Virgins, darling."

Then came a poser. "What *are* martyrs and virgins, Mummy?"

But "Mummy" was equal to the occasion and replied: "A virgin, darling, is what a girl is before she is married. Afterwards she becomes a martyr."

I heard a rather pathetic story of a small boy who had been sent to a boarding-school and on his first day had the usual broadside of questions fired at him. "Where do you live?" "How much pocket-money have you?" "Who's your father?" and so on. To this last question he refused to give an answer and was having rather a bad time of it when a kind-hearted junior master arrived on the scene and rescued the weeping infant from his tormentors. "Why wouldn't you tell them who your father is?" he asked. After much persuasion the little chap told him. "My father is the bearded lady at Barnum's!"

A youngster I know once asked me my age. "A hundred and fifty next birthday," I told him, "No," he said reflectively. "No one is a hundred and fifty, so you can't be." "Well, how old do you *think* I am?" I asked him, and got the devastating answer: "Sometimes you might be any age, but generally about fourteen!" That same child had a pet kitten he loved, and to his great grief it got poisoned. It was buried solemnly in the garden and given an elegant tombstone with its name and *Requiescat in pace* engraved on it. The child asked his elder brother, a preparatory

schoolboy, what the inscription meant, and the boy translated it delightfully as, "Leave the cat in peace."

Children of the present day certainly have a much better time than they did in Victorian days. Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* gives us a wonderfully illuminating picture of how they were then kept in their place. She makes one of her characters say, "I cannot recollect that our evenings were ever merry. No young people's are, I suppose, *when those they look up to are at home.*"

In Jane Austen's days there were no preparatory schools like "Betteshanger", where I recently spent a very happy week-end. Betteshanger is gloriously beautiful ; it stands in grounds of several hundred acres in the loveliest part of Kent. The boys are taught on that sensible modern theory of developing their personalities. They have their own big garden where they grow flowers, fruit, and vegetables which they sell to the school ; they learn to use their hands and look after themselves and they make their own beds and wait on one another at table. There are no organized games, but they play hard. They learn, too ; far more than they do in ordinary schools, for study is made a pleasure. Such ordinarily dull subjects as geography and history are made as exciting as detective fiction. I have never seen such a happy, healthy lot of little boys at any preparatory school.

Perhaps you have had enough of children ?

Personally I find their society infinitely more interesting than that of their elders ; but then I have none of my own so do not see the trying side of them—bills, illnesses, noise when I want quiet, and so on. I cannot understand how married people can make up their minds not to have any. To me a house without children is like a garden without flowers.

Cockney wit is, of course, not confined to children. Bus conductors are often very quick-witted. A little while ago, when I was riding from the Oratory to Piccadilly Circus, a rather haughty lady got in at Sloane Street and, recognizing an acquaintance, began telling her in a loud voice how much she was inconvenienced by her car being laid up, and how she disliked buses. On arriving in front of the Duke of York's house, the conductor pulled the cord and, winking at the other passengers, said : “ 'Ere y'are, lady. You was wantin' 'Er Royal 'Ighness the Duchess of York, wasn't yer ?”

Another day, however, I saw the position reversed and a conductor very neatly scored off by an old lady. She was climbing painfully to the top of the bus—it was full inside—and the conductor said to her : “ 'Urry up, lady ; if you was to take yeast you'd rise quicker.” The reply, which came in a flash, was, “And if *you* were to take it you'd be better bred !”

Bus conductors are marvels of patience. During Christmas week I was in a bus in Brompton Road

while the conductor with infinite courtesy was dealing with three ladies. One of them wanted to be set down at Selfridges ; another thought she was on the way to Euston and was very indignant that she could not be taken there, and the third was bombarding him with questions. "Question time, I call it," he said to me. "I have been asked today for the exact address of every shop on my route."

There is an amusing story told of a rather pompous member of the Government who had business with the Broadcasting Corporation. One day when leaving the Carlton Club he hailed a taxi and said to the driver : "B.B.C." As he was settling himself in his seat, the man opened the door and asked : "Beg pardon, sir ; *which* A.B.C. did you want to go to ?"

Yes, London is an amusing place. I seldom walk in the streets without witnessing at least one interesting incident. The other day I went to see a friend who lives in Chelsea and, walking down Oakley Street, I met a large lady with a red face. She was wearing an apron and carrying a market basket. As she rolled gaily along, she sang a joyous roundelay and kicked a piece of wood in front of her, as boys are apt to do. How much such an episode would brighten Bond Street. Imagine Lady Cunard and Lady Beecham—in friendly rivalry as ever—trying which could kick an empty box the farthest !

Rivalry, perhaps, is hardly the right word to use

in connection with Lady Cunard, for she is now without a rival. She has made her enemies—if she ever had any—her footstool. Her leading position in London society has been achieved by a marvellous combination of patience, perseverance, wit, and ruthless determination. Like “dear Lady Speyer” in Max Beerbohm’s amusing verse, she has climbed “higher and higher”, but—as was said of Verdi—always on her own shoulders. I wish she would write her reminiscences, “warts and all”, as Cromwell said. “The Revelations of St. John the Divine” would be nothing to them.

And the really important people? Perhaps you will ask, Where are they? Well—anyway, I have given you Lady Cunard !

CHAPTER XIII

PICTURES AND PLAYERS

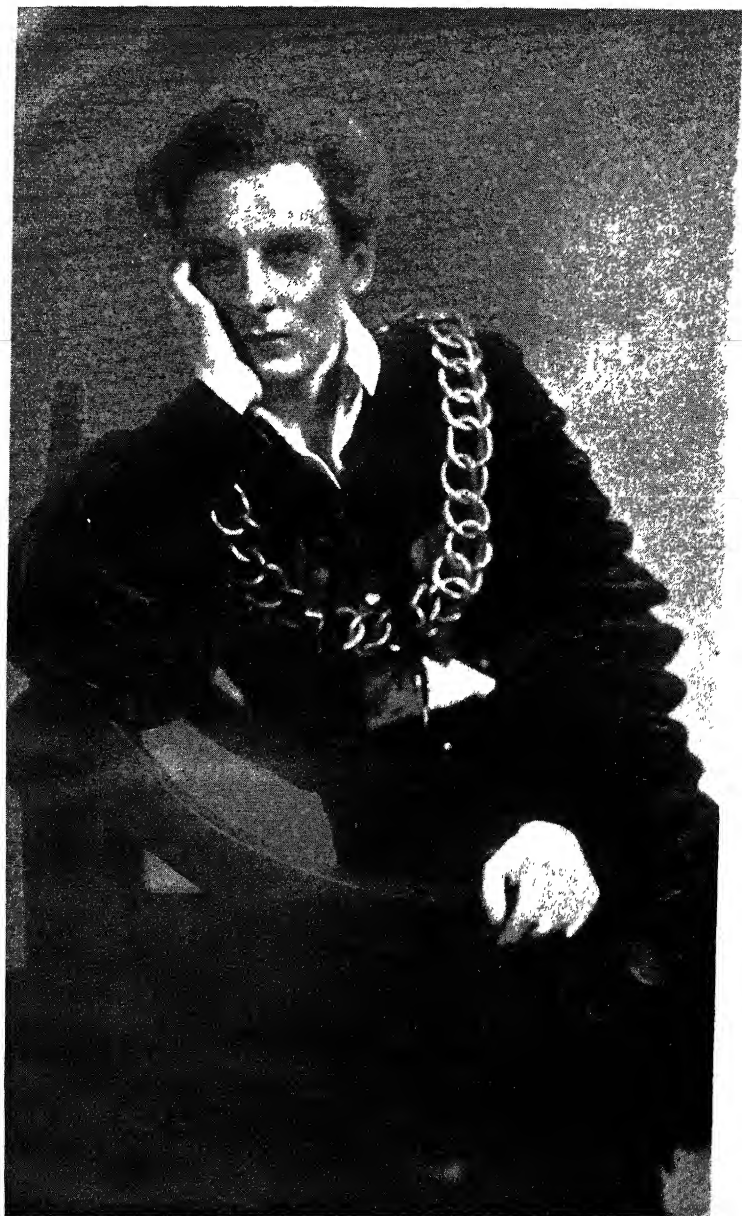
I SUPPOSE it is quite natural that we should be infinitely more interested in those who amuse us than in the more worthy people who try to teach us something or to improve our minds. I always endeavour to edify my readers ; I should like them to regard these chaste pages in the light of what Mr. Stiggins called "moral pocket-handkerchiefs", but I cannot for a moment flatter myself that I am as interesting to the public as Mr. Clark Gable, or the lady whom a youthful film fan of my acquaintance calls, delightfully, Greta Garbage ! The popularity of film stars among the great army of suburban flappers, junior clerks and maidservants is amazing. They have completely ousted actresses and society beauties from their proud position.

On the morning that the death of Rudolph Valentino was announced, a friend of mine, Mrs. Brownlow-Knox, after ringing the bell several times without result, went into her kitchen to see what

was the matter. She found the cook with her head in her hands, rocking herself to and fro in a paroxysm of grief, while the parlourmaid, hardly less affected, was imploring her not to "take on so", and offering to make her "a nice cup of tea". "Good heavens ! What on earth has happened ?" asked my friend. "Don't you know ? Haven't you seen the papers ?" sobbed Cook. "*He's dead.*" "Who's dead ?" They looked at their mistress with astonishment that such a world tragedy should have escaped her notice and, their voices choked with tears, ejaculated : "Valentino."

I can foresee a new aristocracy in which very famous film stars will be given ducal rank—they are about the only people who make enough money to keep up the position in proper style. Lesser celebrities of the screen, and famous actors, might replace earls, barons and such-like. The authors of best-sellers, particularly of the sort of books from which popular films are made, should receive baronetcies and, as a sop to the prejudices of the educated minority and the highbrows, knighthoods could be given to men who had distinguished themselves in the higher branches of literature, art, and music, or who had merely been of service to their country.

But, notwithstanding its popularity, the cinema will have to alter its methods—and possibly its medium—very considerably before it attracts the more intelligent classes of the community to any great extent.



JOHN GIELGUD AS "HAMLET"

At present it seems to be run chiefly by American gangsters and illiterate Jews. There are, of course, good and artistic films, but they are few and far between. "Talkies", up to the present, may be regarded as a talented child with excellent instincts and infinite possibilities who is being ruined by its upbringing. An Oliver Twist, in fact, who has got into the hands of Fagin.

Unfortunately, the vast semi-literate majority are quite content with things as they are. It is the same with all the arts. Were it not for the small critical minority with alert intelligences capable of separating the wheat from the chaff ; those with ears attuned to catch the finer shades of interpretation, who are too sincere to accept and applaud the second-rate, there would be no great music, great interpretation, or, indeed, great art of any kind. Perhaps it is better to shout with the largest crowd. To enjoy frankly the de-compositions of jazz writers must make life more simple.

Though actors are no longer the subjects of the hero-worship they used to receive, their social status has improved enormously. What a change from the time when they were officially known as rogues and vagabonds ! The theatre was, of course, a very important institution in ancient Greece, but we are not told anything about the social status of the theatrical profession. In Rome, some two thousand years ago,

actors were regarded as very small beer indeed. Roman society, in the reign of Augustus, that "Queen Victoria" of the emperors, must have been much like that of London in the 60's. Tacitus tells us that under the pretence of encouraging poetry and music the "best people" in Rome were exposed to the "degradation of the stage", and one recalls how shocked those same "best people" were at Nero's attempt to anticipate the Bright Young Things of today.

I suppose that in all periods the stage has had its Nigel Playfairs and its Vincent Crummles-es, though it is only of late years that it has been recruited from the ranks of society. What a pity that Playfair had to give up the Lyric, Hammersmith, after the fourteen wonderful years in which he made it famous. He told me that soon after the *Beggar's Opera* started its long run, a letter arrived addressed to "— Gay, Esq.". It was a demand for income tax ! He sent it back to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and recommended him to present it personally, which was a polite way of telling him to go to h—— !

Sir Nigel's second son Lyon went to Russia recently with a party of young friends on a forty-guinea tour. The thing that struck them most, apparently, was its depression, its intense discomfort, and its dreary drab degradation and poverty. The boys found it almost impossible to buy food, and what they did manage to obtain was of the poorest quality.

On one occasion they had to wait forty-eight hours for a train at a small country town and all they had during those two days was some weak tea. They found, as do most travellers in that happy land, that Russians are born thieves. They also discovered from everyone with whom they came in contact who could speak a little German, that the present régime is loathed by all except those whom it has thrown up from the sewers and who are in authority and to whom it has brought wealth and power.

Not a really pleasant country to visit, but all would doubtless soon be well there if only Commander Locker-Lampson could be persuaded to overcome his dislike of publicity and take as great an interest in Soviet Russia as he took in the Russia of the Czars—or perhaps he would accept an invitation from the malcontents to help suppress the present régime?

A member of the theatrical profession who has no cause to grumble at the way fortune has treated him, is that clever young man Noel Coward. He must have amassed a large fortune and he deserves it, for he has exactly gauged the taste and the amount of culture which that gentleman of whom we hear so often, the “man in the street”, with his countless relations, can assimilate.

A particularly good story of Noel’s quick wit concerns a popular actress who underwent a well-known “cure” a few years ago. She wanted to play

the leading part in one of his plays and was extremely annoyed when he persistently refused to give it to her. As she insisted on knowing why, he at last said to her, "Well, dear, I hate to tell you, but if you *must* know, you are too old for it." She was furious, and proceeded to tell him exactly what she thought of him. When she at last stopped to take breath, he said quietly : "Come, come, dear, don't add insult to insult !"

On another occasion he had offered a part in his new comedy to a popular actress whose head had been slightly turned by success. She graciously accepted the offer, but with one stipulation. "I must have a holiday in the sun first," said she ; "all my life I have lived for the sun ; I worship it." "Why, certainly, dear," replied Coward. "Of course you must have a holiday. I had no idea there was so much sun at Kennington."

Coward always hated being regarded as a "boy wonder", and was delighted when he arrived at the age of thirty. Soon after that event, my friend, Muriel Barnby—one of the most witty and amusing women in London—asked him to a party. In reply he wrote :

Alas ! I cannot come to your party. I am at last acting up to my reputation as a youthful prodigy. I have the measles !

Two delightful people in the theatre world are Howard Wyndham and his charming wife—they have

a genius for picking out winners. John Gielgud, though not one of Howard's "finds", made his big hit in *Richard of Bordeaux*, and in its successor, *The Laughing Woman*, they launched young Haggard, who will certainly go to the top of the tree.

Another novelist and playwright who has made a fortune is Robert Hichens. He cannot write if there is anything to distract his attention, and he likes to work in a room facing a blank wall. Failing this, he draws the curtains and turns on the electric light. Somerset Maugham, on the contrary, does his best when at his delightful villa in the South of France. The fortunes made by writers such as Coward, Hichens, and Maugham form a curious contrast to the rewards of first-class literary talent. Lytton Strachey left only a little over £9000 !

One of our very best actors is Ernest Thesiger. There is a finish and subtlety in his acting that you very rarely find on the English stage, but what a pity that he so seldom gets a part worthy of his talent ! The Dauphin in *Saint Joan* was one of the best things he ever did, but alas ! *Saint Joan* bored me to death. Compared with Shakespeare's plays—as it was by many of Shaw's admirers—it seemed to me very much what the tragedies of Voltaire are to those of Racine. Voltaire managed to impose himself as a great playwright on the literary world of his day, but his plays are now as dead as he is himself.

Ernest Thesiger owns a nose which he frankly admits he would not mind exchanging for another. The late Madame Réjane, the famous French actress, was also blessed with one that did not improve her beauty. When the two met for the first time, Thesiger looked at her delightedly and exclaimed: "*Mon Dieu, madame*, your nose is uglier than mine!"

Réjane was a very interesting woman and an excellent conversationalist. She once told me an amusing story of a very effeminate French actor who had taken to himself a manly wife. One day, seeing them together, she said to Guitry, with whom she was chatting: "How on earth have those two managed to live together so long?" "Oh," replied Guitry, "it is quite easy to understand. *She makes him such a splendid husband*, you know!"

This reminds me of one of Oscar Wilde's delightful remarks when someone was being rather rude about that popular and rather manly actress of the 90's, Mrs. Bernard Beere. "Oh, please don't be unkind," said Oscar. "She's one of Nature's gentlemen!"

When last in Paris I heard a good story of Cécile Sorel, that landmark of the *Comédie Française*, who firmly refuses to own to more than thirty-five summers. She was visiting Egypt and, of course, made the classic excursion to see the Sphinx by moonlight. On arriving before it she found a party of her fellow countrymen, and immediately began to pose for their benefit.

Addressing the monument, she said : "O Sphinx, who hast seen the passing of countless generations and who knowest the secrets the future hath in store, hast Thou not one word for me ? Speak, oh, speak !" From the heart of the Sphinx there issued a faint rumbling, and a voice murmured : "Maman" !

Yet another French story. A very pretty actress whose admirers were numerous, conceived a most ingenious method of making the less generous among them pay up. She gently led them to the window of a famous dealer in antiques and went into raptures over an expensive *fauteuil* which she said was the desire of her heart but which she could not afford to buy. In the majority of cases the trick worked. The next day she would return to the shop and receive from the dealer the price of the *fauteuil* minus ten per cent which he retained, taking back the chair. She boasted that she had sold it twenty times !

I much enjoyed renewing my friendship with Nikita Balief and his *Chauve Souris* company when they were last in England. His queer, sad, clown's face always fascinates me, but, sad to say, I can no longer get the thrill I once got out of *Katinka* and the *Wooden Soldier*. Balief told me an amusing story of Diaghileff. He was in need of new dancers for his *corps de ballet*, and two particularly thin and scraggy English girls presented themselves. He turned to his musical director and, para-

phrasing St. Gregory, remarked : "*Non angeli sed angli !*"

At one time I used to see a good deal of that brilliant comedian the late Coquelin *père*, at Dieppe every summer. Coquelin was a born actor if ever there was one and he never stopped acting. He once thrilled me merely by telling me how he had caught a cold in his head. As he enumerated the symptoms, one by one, culminating in his retiring to bed with a hot-water bottle, I felt I had assisted at an epic drama. Coquelin used to poke good-natured fun at the English trying to speak French. He was often engaged to recite at the concerts at the Casino, and used to do so very slowly, accentuating every syllable, like a French professor dictating to a class of children. *La Ci-gale ayant chan-té tout l'été*—and so on. His audience always came away feeling that when French was spoken by a master it was a very easy language !

During the War we made the acquaintance of a Belgian actor who told us that he was the Irving of his native land. Since then other Belgian actors have told me that his talents did not amount to much but then, actors are like that. He used to recite a war poem called "*Ceux de Liège*" in our drawing-room, and that damned poem did a lot of damage. It ended : "*Jamais une âme n'oubliera ceux qui sont morts la-bas pour le pays. Ceux de Liège !*" With *Jamais une âme*, which he shouted, he seized a Hepplewhite chair and waved

it in the air. With *ceux qui sont morts* he wept on the Steinway, and when he finally got to *Ceux de Liège* he flopped on to a rather fragile Chippendale settee. We hated "*Ceux de Liège*", and were not sorry they had got what was coming to them.

To go back to the English stage, here is an anecdote of Charles Hawtrey which I believe has not been published. He was always hard up, and one day a friend with whom he was walking said to him : "Damn it ! My watch has stopped. What does your gold watch and chain say, Charlie ?" "Redeem me, please," came the answer.

The late Maurice Farkoa used to tell an amusing though slightly indiscreet story of a famous comedy actress who is happily still with us and showing the younger generation how to act. A very aristocratic lady, a great admirer of Farkoa—who was indeed adored by society women—had never met an actress, which, as Euclid says, is impossible, but nevertheless, true, as it happened in the mid-nineties. Farkoa was asked to remedy this defect in the lady's education, and he induced the actress in question to lunch with her one Sunday. A distinguished party was invited to meet her, but with the best will in the world, conversation flagged, society and the stage having then few topics in common. At last the actress, bored to death, said in a loud voice, "Bottom. Now I've said it !" Oddly enough, this little *jeu d'esprit* relieved

the tension, and during the rest of the luncheon all went merry as a marriage bell.

The popularity of the cinema has practically killed the small theatrical touring company, which I, personally, regret, as I have often got a lot of amusement from their performances. During the War I saw *Sappho* at a "fit-up" theatre in Edinburgh. The company was incredibly bad ; bad enough to be intensely comic, and the audience was so ribald in its mirth that poor Sappho, who was about sixty ; who lacked two front teeth and had very little hair, waxed indignant and came before the curtain to chide us. She said that it was a "shyme"—as indeed it was, that we "didn't ought to make gyne of them", that she would have the curtain rung down and we could have our money back. After that things were a little quieter until Sappho began to die, when my wife's little Pekinese, which up to then had slept quietly on her lap, suddenly woke up and, looking at the stage with all the contempt of that royal breed for the lower orders, gave one sharp yelp. This set everyone off again, and the end was not peace.

When one has passed middle age it is curious to note how dead and forgotten are the reputations of many of those whose names were once so potent to charm us. "Alas"—to quote Edmund Burke—"there is no voice, however sweet, that is not soon stilled ; no name, however famous, the echoes of which do not

grow faint at last." And not only do the reputations of the dead pass quickly away. In the course of an ordinary lifetime, names of living people which have once been almost household words are forgotten by all but the few. Especially is this true of writers and of those who entertain us. A notable instance is that of Charlie Chaplin, once the idol of the "movies". He is still a celebrity, but his name has no longer the magic power that it once possessed. I recently asked a little "picture fan" of twelve summers which of Charlie's films he liked best, and he told me he had never seen one !

London society—of the cheaper and more pushing sort—is not at its best when it gets hold of a famous airman or film star. The struggle to get Charlie to lunch or dine during his last visit was a typical example of its methods. One lady, whose passion for celebrities is so great that her house is known as the "Corner House", telephoned to his hotel five times one day and wrote twice, asking him to fix an evening to dine. She sent the letters by her butler with instructions to wait for an answer. At last he accepted her invitation and she asked a large party to meet him. Alas ! He had fixed the date for the day on which he was leaving for Germany by the morning train !

Sir Nigel Playfair's youngest son, Andrew, when a very small boy had a devastating way of putting his elders where they belonged. He was an extremely at-

tractive child, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who happened to be calling on Nigel one morning on some theatrical business, promptly fell for him. "What a *darling!*" she exclaimed in her deep voice, and, turning to Lady Playfair, said : "He must come to lunch with me." Andrew did not want to lunch with her and said so, but on being given an old-fashioned look by his father, accepted politely. "We will go to the Carlton," announced Stella, who fancied herself in the role of the famous actress doing the motherly act, surrounded by *maîtres d'hôtel* and an army of lesser functionaries, with everyone around saying : "Look, there is Mrs. Patrick Campbell ; how she loves children !"

"Oh no !" replied Andrew. "We will go to Barker's."

There was a clash of wills, and Stella capitulated, though with a bad grace.

Arrived at Barker's, things were worse ; nobody knew who she was and she didn't like it. And finally, when Andrew spurned the oysters and grilled chicken she wanted to order and insisted on Irish stew and jam pudding, she got up, flung a ten-shilling note on the table and bounced off, leaving the small boy to look after himself, which, by the way, the self-possessed infant was well able to do.

A charming old lady, who, as Mrs. Arthur Ayers, was a well-known actress in her day, told me that Lewis Waller was one of the most delightful men in

the profession and that it was a pleasure to act with him. Once, when they were playing *Henry V*, in which play he greatly fancied himself, he asked her if she could suggest any way in which he could improve his interpretation. "Well," she answered, "if you stop looking down so closely into the brazier while you make your long speech, you will have a better chance of living till the last act."

CHAPTER XIV

LET'S GO TO CHURCH

I LIKE going to church! You will probably receive this strange confession with a smile of incredulous pity not unmingled with contempt, for very few people go to church nowadays. Modern biblical criticism and the discoveries of science, even if they have not succeeded in making us any wiser or happier, have shaken the foundations of the old beliefs and dealt a deadly blow to dogmatic religion.

When my friends ask me why I like church-going, I find the question a little difficult to answer. Partly, perhaps, because it revives wistful memories of childhood; of summer evenings in old country churches, when, through the open doors, one caught glimpses of trees gently waving in the light breeze and the cawing of the rooks mingled with the grave beauty and sweetness of the liturgy. Partly, too, because I have always been extremely sensitive to the charms of poetic prose; and what lover of the music and magic of words can fail to be fascinated by Isaiah, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon?

But to return to church-going (don't the clergy wish we would !). If I tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I must confess that its chief attraction to me is the music. *On revient toujours à ses premiers amours*, and I have always loved church music. It is, too, the one branch of the art in which England is pre-eminent. I do not think we shall ever take a leading place in opera. As a matter of fact, opera in every country is beginning to lose its charm, especially for the younger generation, and youth calls the tune even if it does not pay the piper. Again, we do not—and I fear, we never shall—produce vocalists and instrumental *virtuosi* equal to the most famous of the Continental celebrities, especially as regards interpretation. Where are our Gerhardtts, our Kreislers, or our Cortots ? It is largely a question of temperament plus hard work. We English are not temperamental, which we cannot help, and we hate hard work, which we could help but won't. But when it comes to church singing and our best church music, no one can touch us.

I have recently been making a sentimental journey round the London churches, starting at the Temple. Perhaps it was not a good starting-point, as its singing makes that of all the other London churches "look like thirty cents". Then, too, the comparison is hardly a fair one as the Temple has certain definite advantages possessed by no other church. It has



MR THALBEN BAIL

plenty of money to spend, a choir-practice every day, only two services on Sundays and none on weekdays, and in Thalben Ball it possesses an organist second to none and equalled by very few, and who is, moreover, a genius at choir training.

I like the self-conscious professional air of the Temple choir. Even the smallest choristers have it. "You've come to hear us. Well, here we are," they seem to say as they march in. The afternoon service—especially every third Sunday—is rather a musical performance than a religious function. Every Sunday afternoon other choirs take "busmen's holidays" and go to hear their famous rivals, and the church is always full of organists. Apart from the music, however, the Temple service is not attractive to the lover of ritual. There are no flowers, no candles, no incense, no proper altar, and the beautiful old building has been to a large extent spoilt by restoration in a bad period. The choir wear those old-fashioned eighteenth-century surplices, like Victorian night-gowns, and there are beadles with black gowns, bands, rods and all. Then, too, the church smells stuffy—"the odour of stale Anglicanism", as a Roman Catholic friend of mine calls it!

But they *can* sing. From few churches or choral societies in England do you get such sensitive singing. Small boys are very emotional creatures, and Ball, who hates the cold, rather "bottle" quality that you hear so often, encourages emotionalism and teaches his

little soloists to use a *vibrato* when the music calls for it. Their singing of the Psalms is a revelation and the diction is so good that you can hear every word. It is very amusing to hear the despairing grief those infants put into their voices when they tell you that they "sink fast in the deep mire", that "shame has covered" their innocent young faces, or that they have become "strangers unto their brethren"! Their certainty of attack is admirable, and they sing the most difficult works, such as Bach's "Passion", his B Minor, and the Brahms "Requiem", without a conductor.

The Temple has a Bach tradition, and nowhere else do I derive so much pleasure from his music. There is no doubt that Bach's works gain enormously by being performed in intimate conditions—above all in a church. They lose half their effect when rendered by the enormous chorus and orchestra of the Royal Choral Society in the abominable Albert Hall.

I wish, though, that Ball would give us the motets of Palestrina and use more freely the incomparable musical heritage left by Byrd, Tallis, Gibbons, and the other Tudor composers. It is, I expect, the fault of the choir committee that he does not do so. This committee is composed of famous judges and barristers such as Lord Darling, Lord Justice Avory,* Sir Alfred Tobin, and so on, whose tastes are naturally apt

* Sir Horace Avory died after these lines were written.

to be a little Victorian and run in the deplorable direction of Elvey, Stainer, Garret, and their like. They insist on too many of those dull "Services", "Smith in C" or "Jones in A", so beloved of cathedral organists, and also too much Walford Davies, whose sentimental church music is curiously popular with some organists. He manages to achieve a rather clever blend of the hymn and the drawing-room ballad. Mendelssohnian tunes and quasi-modern harmonies served up with a dash of Davies. His chants and hymn tunes are admirable, but he is less effective in longer works and his idiom soon becomes tiresome.

Ernest Newman made an amusing suggestion to Ball a little while ago. We had just been listening to Stravinsky's *Symphonie des Psaumes*, and he said: "Why don't you get Stravinsky to write an anthem for the Temple Choir!" Horrid thought! But it cannot be worse than much of music beloved of organists. Take some of the settings of the Te Deum. "Te-dious" it ought to be called when so maltreated. One wonders that any organist takes the trouble to teach his choir such trash. It would be far better to use plain song.

In the days of Master Lough, of "Hear My Prayer" fame, the Temple Church used to be so crowded that they were obliged to issue tickets, and even then hundreds of people were frequently turned away. By the way, I introduced the "Hear My Prayer"

record to Florence, and it became for a time enormously popular, especially with the "O to be in England Now that April's here" type of bachelor, of whom there were so many living in that delightful city before Mussolini taught the strenuous methods of Fascism to the youthful Florentines and reformed their morals. They (the bachelors) used to meet in one another's rooms after dinner and turn on the record, and when Master Lough, with ineffable purity, sighed for the wings of a dove, they wept Chianti tears at the thought of how much better they might have been if they had not happened to be what they were.

Apropos of the Temple, how strange it is that they who set in action the dread arm of the law should have such goodly dwelling-places. The Temple, Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn—what could be less suggestive of the evil passions of men, their hatreds and quarrels, than the old-world dignity of the Temple, the cloistered peace of Gray's Inn, or the tender grace of Lincoln's Inn Fields on a May morning? Sitting in the Master's garden in the Temple, the sound of the traffic in Fleet Street comes to one like the far-off murmur of the sea, and on Sunday it is like a cathedral close.

One Sunday Lord Justice and Lady Greer invited me to lunch with them at Gray's Inn. It was Guest Day, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Lunch was preceded by service in the old chapel, where four boys and three men made music. The Lessons were read by members of the Bench and there was a warmth and sincerity one hardly expected to find in a church dedicated to the law. To me, the congregation was the most interesting part of the ceremony. Bishops, judges, and famous barristers have almost invariably keen, clever faces. Lord Justice Greer's fine face is like that of a medieval prelate, and one barrister was exactly like Cruickshank's drawing of Sergeant Buzzfuz.

We had lunch in the beautiful Tudor Hall hung with portraits of the various distinguished members of the legal profession who have held offices at the Inn—among them Francis Bacon, who was for a time Treasurer. We sat at the table which was made for the occasion when Queen Elizabeth was entertained there; a table so large that it had to be made in the hall itself, and cannot be removed. When they want it out of the way it has to be raised to the roof by pulleys. The lunch, needless to say, was all that could be desired—good old English fare and wines beyond reproach. Mr. Baldwin, who was also a guest, looked absolutely in his right place in those surroundings. He was never meant for the dirty business of politics.

After the Temple I "did" the cathedrals, beginning with Westminster Abbey, which even the scores of vulgar monuments cannot prevent being one of the

most lovely churches in Christendom. There I found a dignified ritual in an incomparable setting—and a musical service that leaves much to be desired. I don't know who is responsible, but it is high time that something was done about it. It is the first church that Americans and colonials go to on their arrival in England, and what a shock it must give them! Fortunately their second visit is invariably to the Temple, guided by the star of Master Lough in Mendelssohn's egregious motet, so their first impression of London church music is revised. The singing at St. Paul's Cathedral is better, but somewhat cold and conventional—rather of the country cathedral order.

When Sir Richard Terry was organist and choir-master at Westminster Cathedral, the singing there was probably the best in the world. It is a thousand pities that they allowed him to leave. I have never heard the music of Palestrina and his school so exquisitely rendered as it was under that past-master of the polyphonic school, but unfortunately he could not manage to hit it with the clerical staff—the clergy are nearly always ignorant and interfering with regard to music. They have now reduced the choir to very small proportions, and the singing is definitely second-rate.

Talking of the quarrels of organists and their clerical colleagues, there is a funny story told of the

organist of a Roman Catholic church in Ireland whose language was not exactly suitable for clerical circles. His solo boy had a regrettable tendency to sing flat, and one Sunday morning when he was conducting a Palestrina mass the child sang rather worse than usual. To the dismay of the officiating priest an angry voice was heard exclaiming, "There you are, you little ass, flat on your b—t—m again !"

I think that on the whole the music in the average London church is not so good as it used to be. This is easy to understand, as congregations are so small that there is not enough money to keep things going properly. At St. Peter's, Eaton Square, which used always to be crowded, I counted, one evening, nineteen people beside myself. The singing there is still good and Holy Trinity, Sloane Street has also a quite efficient choir. I was surprised on my visit there to be handed the bag by Ernest Thesiger, who did it most elegantly. He so impressed me that I nearly pulled out half a crown instead of the sixpence I had brought for the collection, but mercifully realized what I was doing before it was too late !

On the following Sunday I went to Saint Bartholomew's, Smithfield, and Henry Ainley—who is a churchwarden there—officiated. I expected, when I next went to St. Paul's Cathedral, to see Leslie Henson helping to take the collection. There is a story told of a man who was not very well up in church matters

and who was asked to go to St. Margaret's, Westminster, one Sunday. "Do come," said his friend. "Henson" [Canon Hensley] "is preaching." "Well, I am surprised," was the answer. "I hope he preaches as well as he acts!"

What a beautiful old church St. Bartholomew's is, and how few Londoners seem to know it! It has the medieval and religious atmosphere which—in spite of its antiquity—is so lacking in the Temple Church. Until recently the choir was lighted by candles, like Ely Cathedral and the lovely Tudor chapel of King's College, Cambridge, which, by the way, has one of the best choirs in England. The choristers at St. Bartholomew's wear the scarlet cassocks, short surplices and ruffs of the Tudor period—a most becoming costume. I wish it had the Temple music. If I were a millionaire, I would endow it and engage Ball—at any salary he liked—to preside over the choir. The rector, Canon Sidney Savage, is in keeping with the church. He is a Chaplain to the King and in his scarlet robes reminds one of Raphael's portrait of Pope Julius II.

You enter St. Bartholomew's by the historic gateway from the window of which Queen Mary used to spend pleasant mornings watching Protestants burn to the glory of God on what is now Smithfield Market. To attend service in so ancient a church as St. Bartholomew's gives one a curious sense of unreality; of

playing one's little part in an endless puppet show which has been going on since the beginning of time. How many priests have celebrated mass at those altars ! For how many centuries have boys just like these sung the responses so long as their fresh frail voices lasted, and passed on, giving place to others !

The fires of Smithfield flicker and die, and through the dim, vaulted cloisters the ghosts of the martyred pass in procession before one, for St. Bartholomew's is full of ghosts. Among others, that of the monk Rahere haunts it, ever watchful for the welfare of the church and the hospital he founded and loved.

After St. Bartholomew's I tried an Anglo-Catholic church for a change, and went to All Saints', Margaret Street. No empty pews there. The Anglo-Catholics take their religion seriously ; you feel that it matters to them. The singing was good, and how well the choirboys behave ! They march in, right about, and bow sharply to the altar, turn again, and march to their places with military precision. Hanging on the south wall there is a very charming Sienese picture which I once tried to buy. It is almost impossible to see it properly, as the light is so bad, but, if I remember rightly, it is by some follower of Bartolo di Fredi.

A parson friend of mine, who is the vicar of a beautiful old church in the country, was once telling his bishop—who rather disapproved of his somewhat

extreme Anglo-Catholic tendencies—that he had just had the electric light installed in his church. “But,” he said, “we have not had to buy any expensive fittings, as I have converted our beautiful old lamps.” “I am glad to hear it,” answered the bishop. “I hope that now they are converted they will burn with a more religious light !”

Another prelate who has a virulent dislike for the Anglo-Catholic party is Bishop Barnes, who was once Master of the Temple. He is the most amiable of men, but you have only to say “Anglo-Catholic” and he is apt to go off at the deep end. He was once waiting for a train at a small country station and on going to the bookstall to buy something to beguile the tedium of the journey found that the boy had only two papers left—the *Church Times*—the leading Anglo-Catholic organ—and *Poultry*.

He bought the former and said afterwards that he hadn’t been reading it five minutes when he wished he had purchased *Poultry* !

Among the churches I visited was St. Clement Dane’s, where the intentions of the choir are better than its performance. I was greatly struck with the energy of its vicar, who preached, intoned, and conducted the musical performance. He has also composed the tunes for a supplementary hymn-book, the words being written by his wife. It is a charming old church. Dr. Johnson used to attend it.

I must not forget Southwark Cathedral, where the singing, playing, atmosphere, and ritual are all alike admirable, and where the musical taste is excellent. I did not visit a Christian Science church. They are said to pay their organists well. Ball has just been commissioned to set some hymns by Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy to music. Talking about hymns, I like the way a Hindu student translated "Rock of Ages, cleft for me." In Hindu it read : "Very old stone, split for my benefit, let me absent myself under one of your fragments." I have a sneaking affection for many of the old hymn tunes. "We love the place, O God", "Sun of my soul", and so on. When I was very young, I always thought that in the latter they sang "When the soft *Jews* in early sleep" instead of dews, and wondered if the Jews were really softer than other people. I now know that they are not, especially when they are named Douglas Gordon or Angus McDonald !

The clergy in private life are often the most charming of men, broadminded and cultured. One of the most delightful parsons I have ever met is Canon Brook-Jackson, the vicar of Kensington. He was, for years, rector of St. Leonard's, Streatham, which has never got over his departure. Brook-Jackson has, when he preaches, the rare experience of seeing people enter the church just before the sermon, instead of scurrying away as soon as the hymn

strikes up. I don't wonder; he is one of the best preachers I know and he has a first-rate modern brain. And what a silver tongue! No one can resist it; he would charm money from a Frenchman for any cause for which he was pleading.

He told me an amusing story of another famous preacher who was recently travelling with his wife from the Highlands to Edinburgh. He had telegraphed to Aberdeen ordering two lunch-baskets, and on arriving at Aberdeen station he saw a boy walking up and down the platform, calling out, "Lunch-baskets! Lunch-baskets!" "Are those the baskets telegraphed for by Dean ——?" he asked. "I dinna ken the name," replied the boy, "but one's whusky an' the other's gin!"

Hard by the vestry door at St. Mary Abbots is a memorial tablet with a Latin inscription ending *Amicis omnibus flebilis occidit*, which puzzled one of the choirboys. "What's that in English, please, sir?" he asked Canon Brook-Jackson. "It means," said the Canon: "My friend died of phlebitis through accidentally falling off an omnibus." "Poor chap!" said the kind-hearted child. "You have to be careful getting off them buses."

Choristers are an amusing race. In the summer of 1931 Ball took his boys for a trip to Marseilles by boat—what other London choristers get such holidays?—and one day when they were seated at a café taking

refreshment, he said to one little chap: "Now, Kenny, suppose you ask for the bill in your best French." Kenny blushed and called "*Garçon !*" "*Bien, monsieur,*" smiled a benevolent waiter. "*Garçon, donnez moi . . .*" At this point his French failed him, and bringing out his pocket dictionary he hunted up the word "bill". He found it, and said he, knowing the language: "*Donnez moi le bec d'oiseau !*"

Another Temple boy scored off me very neatly one day. I happened to be wearing a black tie and a black hat, and he asked me, "Who are you in mourning for?" I answered: "I am in mourning for my sins, Jacky, which are more in number than the hairs of my head." He looked at me with a disarming smile and said: "I always knew you were a good man!"

The Temple choristers are educated at the City of London School, and during the Christmas examinations the general knowledge paper for junior boys contained the question: "Where do you find elephants?" Master King—a probationer, just ten—didn't know, and frankly—being rather bored by the proceedings—didn't care. His experience of elephants had been limited to the Zoo, where he felt they were in their right environment. Master King sucked an inky finger and with unseeing eyes gazed around him seeking inspiration. It came! . . . "Elephants are so large that they are very seldom lost"! he wrote.

Ball told me recently an anecdote concerning the quick wit of Lord Darling. At lunch one Sunday with the Benchers, one of the guests said to him (Ball) : "I always mix you up with another well-known organist—Harold Darke." "Oh, you can't really mistake one for the other," said Lord Darling. "Darke's bald, Ball's dark."

A famous counsel once reversed the usual procedure and scored very neatly off Darling. The case being heard concerned a music-hall contract and in the course of the evidence the name of George Robey was mentioned. "Who is George Robey?" said his lordship, making play with the supposed ignorance of the Bench with regard to popular favourites. "He is the *darling* of the halls, my lord," came the answer, as quick as lightning.

I envy those ready-witted people. I myself am apt to think of the *mot juste* two or three minutes too late. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Liverpool, is, I am told, very quick in the uptake.

During Lent one year he called on his congregation for a week of sacrifice and asked them to bring him the money they had saved by giving up some little pleasure. At the end of the week a man brought him a box full of sixpences. "I like whisky-and-soda, my lord—*this is the soda!*" "That man is full of the right spirit," said the Bishop !

Like all popular musicians, Ball gets many letters

from unknown admirers. Here is one he received recently :

Dear Sir,

I have often lisened to you on the wirles. Cud you recomend me a teecher for the ocheriner? It is the onely instrumant my son, aged 16 can play as his nails grows in insted of out and thought you might know.

Yours respectfully,

Ball has recently had the degree of Doctor of Music conferred upon him by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the request of the Benchers of the Middle and Inner Temple, supported by the leading members of the musical profession. He is, I believe, one of the youngest musicians to have received this honour.

CHAPTER XV

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS AND OTHERS

THE Fatal Sisters are tricky hussies, and on few of the sons of men have they played more scurvy tricks than on Lord Alfred Douglas—"Bosie" to his friends. They endowed him with birth, wealth, amazing good looks, personal charm, poetic genius, and an excellent constitution. And then—after the manner of their sex—repented of their generosity. "We've done too much for Bosie Douglas," said they, but :

"Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost."

And "tempest-tost" it certainly has been ; indeed, it is only of late that he has steered it into calm waters.

Not only, however, has he survived the stormy weather ; he has preserved intact his natural sweetness of disposition, his charm, and his perennial boyishness.

Why has heaven afflicted me with that infantile complex of yours? You remind me of Mrs. McStinger's baby, who was constantly making a low-spirited noise,

wrote Bernard Shaw, who had written something about him in his appendix to Frank Harris's book to which Bosie objected.*

Everybody knows the history of Bosie's connection with Oscar Wilde and the bitter controversies that raged between the enemies and the partisans of that unfortunate genius. But everybody does not know how Bosie—who was only twenty-two at the time, and an extraordinarily young twenty-two at that—was calumniated and misrepresented by those who took part in those controversies, especially by the late Robert Ross, who so cleverly and—for himself—so profitably exploited his championship of Wilde. He seems to have been considered fair game for anyone who wrote about the Wilde case. No wonder Bosie became irritated and—like an animal at bay—lashed out right and left at friends and foes alike. To those who know the real history of the extremely complicated case, he is, of all those who played a part in it, the one who emerges from it with the greatest credit. The storm has at last spent itself, but the interest in the personalities of the leading actors in the tragedy is still very much alive.

* Shaw subsequently withdrew what he had written.

Ross was a clever, somewhat sinister person, and he undoubtedly had a strange fascination for some people. Rather like that of the Ancient Mariner for the Wedding Guest. Anyone else would have been absolutely finished by the dramatic result of his libel action against Lord Alfred Douglas. So damning and overwhelming was the evidence of the defendant's witnesses that the judge—Mr. Justice Coleridge—summed up dead against him, and had it not been for the obstinacy of one of the jurymen, the jury would have stopped the case. As, however, they could not agree, it was put back for retrial.

Ross was so terrified that a further appearance in Court would lead to his arrest, that he got his solicitors to persuade Douglas to consent to a *nolle prosequi* being entered, agreeing also to pay all his costs, which was, of course, tantamount to an admission of guilt. Notwithstanding this, the late Sir Edmund Gosse and Mr. H. G. Wells got up a public testimonial to Ross, and it was signed by a large number of friends, including the then Prime Minister—Mr. Asquith—and his wife and presented to him together with a cheque for £700 !

Perhaps had Mr. Asquith foreseen the result of his rather indiscreet championship of his friend, he would not have been quite so altruistic. It undoubtedly lost him his seat at Fife. At the election meetings he was tremendously heckled about it and his opponents

did not fail to improve the occasion. By a curious coincidence, too, Gosse shortly afterwards lost his pleasant and lucrative post as Librarian to the House of Lords. Ross, however, continued to flourish like a green bay tree. He had to resign his post of Assessor of Picture Valuations to the Board of Trade, but his friends saw to it that he was soon given another well-paid job and when he departed this life *The Times* gave him an obituary notice of nearly a column !

Wilde's great place in English literature is now universally recognized, and Bosie—even such is time—is rapidly becoming *persona grata* for the very same reason which some thirty-odd years ago caused him to be socially ostracized ! His sense of humour prevented him from being too crushed by the social hypocrisy of which he was the victim, and he cleverly satirized it in his amusing poem “The Duke of Berwick”.

He and the Duchess always turned their backs
On those whose conduct was the least bit lax.
Where'er they went they waved a moral banner
And constantly left rooms “in a marked manner”.

Time, moreover, has not merely reconciled Bosie to his own caste ; it has given him his rightful place as the writer of some of the most beautiful lyric poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—poetry which is included in nearly all the anthologies. Edward



LADY ALFRED DOUGLAS

"I have seen youth go and joy depart,
But God has given me a merry heart.
I know that luck fails and love ends,
But I thank God for my old lovers and new friends."
Olive Douglas
"To Percy."

Hutton, who is no mean judge, says : "Alfred Douglas is, I think, incomparably the best poet alive in England today. He is not half so well, or rather universally, known as he ought to be."

Besides being a poet he is a distinguished Shakesperian scholar and critic. Soon after the publication of his recent book on the Sonnets, Shaw wrote him a letter over two thousand words long which began :

Your book on the Sonnets is by far the best of all those I have read on the subject. Nobody else has understood the case of Mr. W. H. and nobody else has understood the case of Shakespeare so naturally and unstudiously.

Lord Alfred's autobiography, too, is one of the most revealing human documents that has ever been written.

Bosie undoubtedly inspired Wilde. The whole of the *Importance of Being Ernest* was written while he was sitting in the room. Wilde put into it things they had said to each other, reading it out delightedly as he wrote it. Then, too, the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* was polished and put into its final shape by Wilde when he was staying with Bosie at his villa near Naples, and *De Profundis* in its original form was a letter beginning "Dear Bosie".

Wilde must have been a delightful companion.

"When he came into a room," says Bosie, "life took on a different aspect ; depression vanished ; he would talk in his golden voice :

Till mean things put on beauty like a dream
And all the world was an enchanting place.*

"Never," he told me "have I met anyone who remotely approached him as a conversationalist, and he could be as profound as he was witty. Contrary to what was said by those who did not know him, he was kind and human to a degree. He never, like Macaulay and Gladstone, monopolized the conversation, but always tried to draw out everyone present.

He was, of course, a master of the paradox and the anticlimax and his way of telling a story was inimitable. Here is one which, though it is not new, bears repeating. At dinner one evening the conversation turned on presence of mind, and Oscar said : "Let me give you an instance of it. A fire broke out behind the scenes at a country theatre and when the audience saw smoke pouring on to the stage and caught the ominous glimpse of flames, they began to make a rush for the exits. Suddenly a young actor appeared behind the footlights, and in a stentorian voice shouted : 'Keep your seats ; there is no danger.' Reassured by his air of authority, they kept their seats—and every one of them was burnt to death !"

* "The Dead Poet".—Alfred Douglas.

A short time ago I read in a famous Sunday paper a letter from a lady saying that she met Wilde after the production of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and when congratulating him on the success of the play, remarked that it was "full of quotations". To this, she asserts that Wilde replied : "The quotations were originally in inverted commas, which had been omitted by the printers." The story seemed to me so silly and pointless that I sent the paper to Lord Alfred, and this is what he said :

"Had the lady ventured to make so gratuitously impertinent a remark, Wilde would have promptly put her in her place. There are no quotations in *Lady Windermere's Fan* except from Wilde's own works."

Another paper the other day reproduced for the five thousand, five hundred and fiftieth time the hoary old chestnut about Wilde and Whistler. According to this story, Whistler is supposed to have made some brilliant remark—the brilliant remark is significantly not recorded—and Wilde is supposed to have said : "I wish I had said that." Whereupon the brilliant Whistler brilliantly replied : "You will, my boy, you will."

"This story—which appears to be the only specimen of Whistler's conversational wit to have survived—was being repeated in various editions all over London, so I asked Wilde if it was true. He

answered that it was an absolute invention and that no such incident had ever happened.

“The point of both these stories is to represent Wilde as a man who imitated others and borrowed from them. He did nothing of the kind. Why should a man who had in himself an unfailing spring of wit and enchantment in conversation and in writing, copy or steal from his inferiors? To compare Whistler with Wilde, as a wit, is ridiculous. Their written words are proof enough. Whistler was a good painter, but as a writer he was not even fifth rate, as can be seen by anyone who reads his *Ten O'clock Lecture* or his childish and ill-tempered effusion *The Baronet and the Butterfly*. The *Ten O'clock Lecture* is not without wit, but to compare anything of Whistler's with *Intentions*, or *The Importance of Being Ernest*, is like comparing Beverley Nichols with Congreve.”

Wilde had an intense respect and admiration for Queen Victoria, and hated to hear her criticized. When, in 1887, that eccentric and amusing young Russian, Count Stenbock, delighted Oxford with this somewhat ribald little poem, Oscar was most indignant.

There is a thing that no man knows,
How the Queen looks without her clothes.

Ear hath not heard, nor hath eye seen,
The secret fashion of our Queen.

Though many hope that same to see
In this, her year of Jubilee.

Sing "Salvam fac" and eke the Gloria
For our most gracious Queen Victoria.

Like so many clever people, Bosie Douglas has several sides to his character, some contradicting each other. He and his wife are separated, but he adores her, and she writes to him as "Boy Darling". He is a poet and musician, but he loves sport, especially racing. He will discuss learnedly the form of a race-horse with those simple and kindly souls who can talk of nothing else, and who tell you about "Dear old Jimmy, who hunted with the Pytchley", or "Poor old Bill, who died of D.T. the year Chewing Gum won the Grand National". And then he will puzzle them by conversing with someone else about St. Thomas Aquinas, whom they presume to be a horse unknown to them—a dark horse !

When he was at Oxford, he was popular with the sporting set and was a member of Vincent's. He won the two-mile race in the college sports and nearly got his Blue. But he also ran the best undergraduate paper ever produced, *The Spirit Lamp*, to which John Addington Symonds, Lionel Johnson, and Wilde contributed and for which Max Beerbohm wrote his first article.

Until long past middle life Bosie looked amazingly

young. Apropos of this, when he was at Winchester he often used to lunch on Sundays with old General Wombwell. Seven years after he left school he happened to go down to spend a week-end with his old housemaster and met the General, who was getting rather tottery and losing his memory. Seeing a youth of apparently about sixteen before him, he said : "Why, Bosie, I haven't seen you lately. Come and lunch on Sunday. Are you still in the same form ?"

Bosie told me rather a good story of a popular and extremely impecunious peer who is rarely sober. One day, when considerably "under the weather", Lord B—— called on him and asked him to cash a cheque for ten pounds. Alas ! Bosie politely refused the doubtful security, and he took his departure with unsteady dignity. The following day he called Bosie up to apologize. "What must you have thought of me !" he said. "My only excuse is that I had been doing myself a bit too well." Bosie assured him that it didn't matter in the least, and that if he had had the money on him he would have been delighted to oblige, on which Lord B—— said hopefully : "Well, perhaps you can cash it now. Shall I bring it round ?"

Bosie's nephew, the Marquis of Queensberry, is considered to be one of the six best bridge players in England. He is also a very successful stockbroker.

Lady Queensberry is, of course, very well known as an artist ; her flower pictures are highly decorative.

One of the most interesting people I have met for a long time is Miss Eva Fenton, who did such valuable work for the Government during the War, which by the way, she thoroughly enjoyed. She had been champion lady shot of England—she was a champion shot of the Bisley Rifle Club—she has hunted with every pack in the country, and for years never missed an important race meeting. She knows everyone in the racing world, and can tell you stories about them. Here is one she told me about King George and the Earl of Lonsdale. A year or two ago at Goodwood, the Duke of Richmond, who was waiting to receive His Majesty, saw a State coach with out-riders drive up. Thinking it was the King, he advanced hat in hand to meet him, and out stepped—Lord Lonsdale ! After greeting him, the Duke turned away, not noticing that His Majesty was alighting from a Daimler which was just behind. On his making his apologies, the King said, laughing : “I can’t be as royal as Lonsdale, you know.”

Miss Fenton was, I am told, a connection of Lord Kitchener, and knew him intimately. I wonder how the “strong, silent man” legend arose. Beneath his superficial taciturnity he was a bundle of nerves, and he was obsessed by a sex-complex. Miss Fenton told me that one evening when things were going

badly at the front, they dined together and he wept and sobbed for over an hour. He had a passion for old English china and when he took a fancy to any piece, would move heaven and earth to get the owner to give or sell it to him, and was very offended if he met with a refusal. It was not easy to get him to talk if he did not wish to do so. At a dinner-party at the beginning of the War, when the rumour was going round that Russian troops had been landed in England and were passing through on their way to the front, Mrs. Asquith—as she then was—asked him if it was true. “I don’t know,” he answered abruptly, “I have not seen an evening paper.”

The reason he set sail in the fatal *Hampshire* was not, I believe, published at the time it was torpedoed. The Government had discovered that the Russians were selling to the Germans shells and ammunition sent to them from England, and Lord Kitchener decided to investigate the matter personally. The discovery was made through a soldier on leave from the front, who brought home a shell which had been fired by the enemy. He happened to show it to an official of the factory where it was manufactured, who on handling it noticed the Government mark showing its origin and purpose, and at once reported it to the War Office.

Kitchener could enjoy a joke and did not mind one at his own expense. During the South African



LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS AT 22 YEARS OLD

War he was travelling from Durban to Pretoria, and at one of the interminable waits at a wayside station, got out of the train in order to have a chat with a friend who was in camp there. "Is Colonel —— here?" he asked a soldier on guard at the exit. "Yes, sir, but you can't go to the camp, it is against orders." On Kitchener insisting, the soldier said, "I am very sorry, sir, but I can't allow you to pass. That damned Kitchener has given orders that nobody must be allowed to leave the station." Kitchener laughed and asked the man his name, saying, "You are quite right, but I am 'that damned Kitchener'!" He recommended the soldier for promotion.

One of Miss Fenton's war experiences was that of being arrested as a spy. She had been asked by the War Office to organize a miniature-rifle club at Cambridge, and while—accompanied by a small page from the hotel at which she was staying—she was motoring down there, she had trouble with her engine. Two young undergraduates who happened to be passing on bikes came to her assistance, and on trying to find out what was wrong, caught sight of some of the rifles she was taking down with her. "Aha, what have we here—a spy?" said they, and when they had sent her on her way, with true patriotic zeal they telephoned the police at Cambridge that a lady spy in a car full of rifles and ammunition would soon arrive there, and that with her was a youth who

would not speak English properly. Indeed he could not, poor little Cockney !

At Cambridge she was met by a picket of soldiers and taken to the police-station, where a big rude officer curtly refused any explanation. She asked leave to telephone to London, which was refused, and when she mentioned various distinguished people who knew her they laughed in her face. She was then told that she and her small companion would be locked in the cells for the night, on which the terrified infant lifted up his voice and wept, quite convinced that he would be shot at dawn and never see his mother again. Fortunately Miss Fenton suddenly remembered that her portrait with a sketch of her career had appeared that morning in the *Daily Express*, and persuaded them to send for a copy. The officials ate a great deal of humble pie for supper !

Miss Fenton, when a child, used often to stay with the late Lady Rosslyn in Scotland. Lord Rosslyn had a private chapel and at Easter there was a collection which was always given to his chaplain to supplement his salary. Lord Rosslyn himself always gave ten pounds, and as he disliked long sermons he told the chaplain that for every minute he preached *after* a quarter of an hour, he should deduct one sovereign. He placed ten sovereigns on the desk and watch in hand listened to the word of God. The fifteen minutes was never exceeded !

The chaplain in question was much annoyed by the tourists who, in order to avoid paying the sixpence charged for admission when the chapel was not open, would walk in during the service and stare about them. To put an end to this he had the door locked when service commenced. One day he saw an old woman rattling at the door and said : "You must take your seat and wait until the service is over." An agitated voice answered, "Please, sir, I'm going to be sick !"

An intimate friend of Miss Fenton's family was their neighbour, the late Earl of Sandwich. Lord Sandwich used every year to give a big party to which were invited not only the "county" but the smaller gentry and the professional people. On the day of one of these gatherings, Miss Fenton was lunching at Hinchingbroke, and when the general company began to arrive, another of the luncheon guests, the wife of a county magnate whose pride in her ancestry was unbounded—those were snobbish days—noticing a lady whom she considered far beneath her, said to Lord Sandwich : "Really, George, I am astounded that you should venture to invite me to meet people of that class !" Lord Sandwich, to whom that kind of aristocratic vulgarity was a mystery, answered : "So sorry, Mrs. — but I thought that *all you commoners knew one another !*"

Lord Sandwich, by the way, before he came into

the title, was engaged to be married to Lady Alfred Douglas. He was then George Montagu, and she was Miss Olive Constance. She, however, preferred the poet to the future peer, and broke off the engagement. Lady Alfred is herself a poet of charm and distinction.

Another member of the Montagu family was that smart officer Colonel Oliver Montagu, who happened to have a glass eye. He was a strict disciplinarian, and one day in admonishing a rather flighty young subaltern he remarked : "Be careful, young man ; I've got my eye on you." "Which eye ?" replied the irreverent youth.

Miss Fenton had one adventure which nobody will envy her. She was nearly poisoned in mistake for someone else. She was dining with a well-known sporting man who had a good many enemies and the party was going on to the play. As they were rather late finishing dinner the host suggested that the ladies should get their things while coffee was being brought and come back for it. When they returned it was being served and the host handed Miss Fenton the cup which the waiter had just poured out for him. Soon after they arrived at the theatre she was taken desperately ill with all the symptoms of strychnine poisoning. She was taken to a hospital and was at death's door for a long time. The mystery was never solved.

It was Miss Fenton who originated the United

Hunts Ball which is now such a popular annual fixture, and she has just had the happy idea of founding a mixed club for hunting and sporting people—the “United Hunts”, which is going very strong.

An interesting personality is Mrs. Carpenter, whose husband is Dean of Exeter. She comes of a clerical family—her brother is Dean of Chichester—but she is extraordinarily fond of the theatre. She has recently written the scenario of a short film on the history of the Temple, which will soon be released, and she has a quite unusual talent for producing. “She would be a great professional producer,” said Muriel Barnby to me, and Muriel knows. One of the most delightful things I ever saw was her production of the ancient *Coventry Play* at the lovely Inner Temple Hall. Certainly it gave me the impression that in the matter of *mise en scène* the Church has little to learn from the Stage.

CHAPTER XVI

OF YOUR CHARITY !

“**C**HARITY”, we are told, “covereth the multitude of sins”. It also “suffereth long and is kind”—sometimes. But even if it is not always as kind as it ought to be, it is often extremely useful, especially to the charitable !

The cloak of charity needs to be cut on generous lines to enable it to cover the sins involved in the getting up of a big charity ball, for of all forms of so-called benevolence this is the most exploited for selfish ends, and the most wasteful. It appeals above all to two classes ; first, those who have not the faintest interest in the object for which the ball is supposed to be given, but who do not mind paying a couple of guineas to dance to a first-class band at the Dorchester or Claridges with a good supper thrown in ; and secondly to “climbers”. It is these last who are chiefly responsible for the vogue of the charity ball, a vogue which has become so great that it has caused a new profession to arise—that of ball organizer. A well-paid profession too, for the leading organizers

ask a fee of £500. This does not include the cost of printing, typists, postage, use of motor-car, advertising and office expenses, all of which are extra.

Let us suppose that you are a millionaire and that in spite of your millions your lady wife who has social ambitions, has not yet succeeded in pushing her way into what she considers the best houses. You first decide on an object ; a hospital perhaps, or a "home for fallen sisters". Having done this, you call in your organizer—don't forget to take your cheque-book ; she will not move in the matter until her fee is safely banked—and arrange the date of your ball, where it is to be held and so on. She then sets to work regardless of expense. The list of patrons will give her no trouble. It will consist of all the patrons of the hospital or the "fallen sisters", a duchess or two, and, if possible, one of the younger members of the Royal Family—the older ones "cut no ice" nowadays.

It is in choosing the committee that a clever organizer shines. She asks a few really smart and popular society women who, of course, are not expected to do anything beyond giving their names and lending their drawing-rooms for the committee meetings. The rest of the members are chosen from the numerous rich climbers—"tassels on the fringe of society" as the late Sir Claud Phillips used to call them—who are only too delighted to pay for the

privilege of meeting these desirable people. "I met Lady —— yesterday at the Duchess of S's. Do you know her?" they say to those of their friends who are not asked to serve on ball committees.

There are women in London whose names are on the committees of every charity ball ; they attend all the fashionable first nights, lunch at the Embassy and the Ritz, and subscribe to everything. You meet them occasionally at big "crushes", but never at small intimate parties.

There is generally a full attendance at the first committee meeting. The organizer gets up and makes a speech. "Now, ladies," she says, "the printing will be quite expensive. Will anyone be kind enough to undertake to pay the bill?" Some lady—not one of the smart women, *bien entendu* !—always does undertake to do so. And then comes the turn of the band, the champagne, or the cabaret. A well-known "American Creeper" offered to pay the whole expenses of a very big ball which the Prince of Wales had promised to attend on condition that she was allowed to act as hostess and receive the guests. She was assured that H.R.H. would dance his first dance with her. On his arrival she was duly presented, and what was the chagrin of the poor old lady when, on the band striking up, he turned to a pretty girl who was standing near and said : "Shall we have this one?"

The organizer needs all her tact to deal with her

committee, especially if the ball is to be a "period" one. There is a great deal of manoeuvring to be cast for the most attractive characters of the period chosen. At one, let us call it the "Flower Ball", a lady whose past had not been quite without its adventures, insisted on going as "The Lily" ! Sometimes the social amenities become rather feline. A woman I know who was helping at the "Famous Jewels Ball", told me that she came away from the dress rehearsal feeling that everyone was wearing gall-stones !

At another very smart affair, the ambitious wife of a rich Midlands business man, who by dint of a lot of wire-pulling and a big subscription had managed to get herself invited to take part in the pageant, was cast for the part of *La Belle Ferronière*. Now, she had never heard of the lady, and was horrified to learn during the ball that she was representing the mistress of a Renaissance duke. "What *will* they say in Birmingham?" she groaned to the organizer, thinking of her husband's nonconformist business associates.

One would think that with so many of the most expensive items of the bill subscribed for and a large number of tickets sold at at least two guineas each, that most of these balls would result in a very handsome profit for the charity. With many of them, however, this is by no means the case. One of the most famous and best-advertised balls of recent years, a ball attended by everyone in society—and most

of those not in it—showed a loss of over £600. The extremely rich Jewish gentleman who had been responsible for it, paid up, and sent a cheque for £2000 to the charity, which he described as the proceeds of the function.

It is difficult to imagine how all this money is wasted. One would not like to suggest dishonesty on the part of anyone concerned, though there are certain people who are not above making a bit if they get the chance. A charming girl I know, who has been "brought up honest", once had an awful shock at a very smart bazaar. She was helping at the stall of a very pretty and well-known girl, who asked her quite casually: "How much of your takings are you keeping for your expenses?" Horrified at the suggestion that she could be capable of such dishonesty, she protested hotly. "Don't be so melodramatic," said her friend. "I don't wear out my prettiest frocks and bore myself to death doing this sort of thing for nothing. I always take my expenses, and that includes at least one new dress."

In Victorian days one of the best methods of climbing was to take up a fashionable church and work for it. Perhaps the church needed restoring, or a new parish hall was wanted. You arranged a "drawing-room meeting", induced some celebrity to speak—a member of the Cabinet if possible—if not, a bishop—not a colonial bishop—and then by

hook or by crook persuaded a minor Royalty or an important duchess to take the chair. After the meeting you provided an enormous tea, with caviar sandwiches, the richest of cakes, and wine for the men and those of the ladies who felt a little faint after their exertions.

I knew an American woman who got into the innermost shrine by pursuing this method. She was very rich, but she had the sense to realize that she would get nowhere by dressing better and wearing more valuable jewellery than the women she wanted to know. So she wore dowdy clothes of excellent quality, but a little behind the fashion, and old-fashioned jewellery which she always averred had belonged to her dear mother. Her parents, by the way, had made a fortune in grocery in the Middle West. She cultivated only elderly and influential women, whom she constantly fed to repletion with the most expensive food and wine, and went to St. Peter's, Eaton Square, twice every Sunday. Her success was complete, and she married off both her daughters extremely well ; one to a highly respectable peer.

The "feeding" question is all-important when engaged in climbing. A "cutlet for a cutlet" is no use whatever. Cutlets must suffer a "sea change" into something rich—even if not "strange". Caviar and champagne, for instance !

I derive, I regret to say, a rather malicious pleasure

in watching the growth of these social creepers. I like their parties at the beginning of their climb. The list of guests in the *Morning Post* is generally headed by the representative of some minor foreign country or State. The Minister for Lithia—or is it Latvia?—or perhaps the gentleman whom a friend of mine calls delightfully the “Etonian Minister”, a post which, personally, I should much prefer. Then there is a well-known and rather shop-worn peeress, two or three relicts of early Edwardian days whom the world has passed by, and perhaps an old and very respectable lady connected with the stage. As time goes on, these are replaced by the more desirable acquisitions to their visiting-list. Sometimes they find the game too tiring and give it up.

And, after all, though few of them realize it, the people they are so anxious to know are not in the least difficult, and will accept them readily enough if they “fit in”. If not, no amount of scheming and heart-burning will avail them. We English are very lazy, and women, especially those who have inherited their position, are generally quite helpless against the assaults of energetic people who want something very badly and mean to get it. So they look on with amused tolerance and thankfully accept the gifts of the gods.

Democratic though we are in these days, the word “duchess” is still a magic talisman for some women. A certain lady well known as a persistent climber

was asked to contribute some cast-off clothing to a church rummage sale. As she made a point of selling her own discarded garments, she begged some from her friends and sent them to the vicarage. Some of them were so old and dirty that the vicar's wife wrote and told her that they were in too bad a condition for even a sale of that description. She received in reply an exceedingly indignant letter from the lady, saying :

I am surprised that you should take exception to any of the things I have taken the trouble to send you. Perhaps you do not realize that the two evening dresses have been worn by a duchess !

I wonder what they get out of it all? They must find it very tiring. They have to be always on the go, always planning and scheming. As a rule they read nothing but the novel of the moment, as they must, at all costs, be up to date. They are obliged to affect an interest in all sorts of things that bore them to death—pictures, music, sport ; and they have no time to think. Most of them, indeed, dare not think. "Thought would disturb their paradise."

Many of these women, had they been born in another—I will not say lowlier—sphere, would have led happy, useful lives ; but they have too much money, not enough brains, and they have never learnt that "happiness comes from within". It is not to be bought in the market-place.

CHAPTER XVII

FOOD

I LOVE food, and—perhaps to compensate me for the numerous things it has withheld—Providence has given me an excellent digestion ; a digestion that enables me to eat everything I like—even supper at one o'clock a.m.—and to be none the worse for it afterwards.

Eating plays an important role in the scheme of every well-regulated being ; indeed, it is not too much to say that social life would collapse without it. Nearly every variety of entertaining involves a meal. When we meet a man who takes our fancy we ask him to lunch. When a sporting record has been beaten we give the man who has beaten it a dinner, and no woman ever has tea in her own house unless she has asked someone else to drink it with her. Who would care to shoot all the morning and to be given no lunch, or to dance all night without supper !

The only party to which I have ever been asked and at which there were no refreshments of any kind was at the house of the late George Eastman, the “Kodak

King" who founded the Rochester Conservatoire of Music. He was very keen on chamber music and used to invite his friends to hear quartettes on Sunday afternoons. I happened once to be visiting Rochester, N.Y., and he invited me to hear the famous Kneisel Quartette. Music always makes me hungry, so when they had finished playing and the guests seemed to be making a move, I asked discreetly where was the tea room ! Alas ! I was told politely that the proceedings were over.

How awful it would be if science invented different kinds of tablets which one swallowed in place of food and drink, or if we were eventually reduced to a vegetarian diet ! I once lunched with one of the vegetarian cranks. We ate cabbage soup, nut-chicken cutlets with a *purée* of some loathsome kind of peas, and finished with apples and more nuts. The coffee was one of those disgusting brands from which all the essential quality of coffee has been extracted. I felt sick all the afternoon after this revolting meal.

Never believe anyone who tells you that he does not care for what he eats—he is either a fool or a liar, or both. When I was a child my father always used to tell us we must eat to live, not live to eat, and that it was greedy to look forward to meals, but if he didn't like what was set before him there was the devil to pay. I have seen him hurl dishes out of the french window on to the lawn, asking what the blankety

blankety blank the damned cook meant by asking him to eat food that wasn't fit for a pig ! You will, perhaps, gather from this that he had a hasty temper. He had indeed. I often wonder how I myself came to possess such a charming disposition.

What a hollow mockery life must seem to the hopelessly dyspeptic ! The late Lionel Powell was one of those unfortunates. He was the most hospitable of men and loved lunching his friends on the fat of the land, but he himself ate dry biscuits and drank vichy water. The lot of the man whose stomach refuses the joys that his purse permits is even worse than that of the man who, when lunching at an A.B.C., longs passionately for Quaglino's. For the latter there is, at least, hope. The Three Sisters in their spinning may yet weave a golden thread in the web of his fate.

To those who love good living and who have had reverses, the absence of all of what one may call the "rites" of the gastronomic *vie de luxe* causes intense discomfort. A friend of mine, Nicko Wood, who has run through two large fortunes and who is now living on an allowance from his trustees, gets over this when he is in London by taking only a cup of tea in the morning and a biscuit and a glass of beer at lunch, and saving his resources for dinner, which he generally eats in the Carlton grill-room. As he says : "I like to feel civilized once a day." Nicko spends most of

his time at Brighton nowadays. London is too full of temptations !

Considering the size of London, it has very few absolutely first-class restaurants—Paris has at least ten times as many, but its best are as good as can be found in Europe. I suppose all those of us who cultivate the delightful restaurant habit, end by having two or three favourites. Mine are Quaglino's, Boulestin's, and Leoni's little "*Quo Vadis*". The first when I want social life as well as exquisite food, the second when I'm feeling greedy and wish to concentrate on food, and the third when I want to eat thoroughly well but informally.

I love Quaglino's. The two brothers are the best type of Italians, kindly and hospitable and they both have that gift which is possessed only by the born *restaurateur*, the art of making each guest feel that he or she is the client they value above all others. You cannot be a Quaglino merely by knowing all there is to be known about food. You need the tact and diplomacy of an ambassador, a memory for faces equal to that possessed by the late King Edward, and an intimate knowledge of very much more than merely "who's who" in the social and professional worlds.

Quaglino told me that he divides the West End into four categories—1, Society ; 2, the Theatre, which touches society and—in its upper ranks—

associates with it ; 3, Business, which is interested in both ; 4, Crooks, who prey upon the other three groups. And says he : "If you want to be successful, you must not mix their four classes, like a pack of cards."

First-class restaurants play a vital part in the social life of great cities. The other day I met an old friend who has been in the wilds of Africa for the last five years. "I feel thoroughly out of it," said he. "I don't know what people are wearing, what are the things to do and see, who's alive and whose dead." "Go to lunch at Quaglino's," said I, "and you'll soon find out."

What a lot of interesting stories Quaglino *could* tell about the clients of the many famous restaurants in which he has gained his experience. But he won't. I tried him !

That cultured and charming personality, M. Marcel Boulestin, has none of these complications to cope with in managing *his* restaurant. His clients, elderly members of the upper and—especially—the travelled classes, solid business magnates, distinguished foreigners, and those of the world of art who can afford to pay for good food, have all one link in common : they go there to eat.

Boulestin's is the only London restaurant where everything is specially cooked for you. Naturally they will do this at any good restaurant if you order special

dishes, but at Boulestin's it is done as a matter of course. The cooking is a dream, and in no other London restaurant can you get in their perfection the *Bouillabaise* of Marseilles, the delicious *Cassoulet* of Toulouse, the *Basque Piperade*, the *Chou Farci* from Nantes, and the *Quiche* from Lorraine. And Boulestin has some delicious wines that are practically unknown here—for instance, the pink wine of Touraine, and the Loire wines. How these local dishes and wines bring back to memory the perfume of wood fires in little village inns in the Pyrenees, or in Bavaria, where the river trout you eat has been caught the same morning in some mountain stream ; the slow white oxen drawing wagons laden with wood or grapes, the homely smell of the farmyard, and the pleasant country folk !

I like the “Marie Laurencin” decoration of Boulestin's dining-room and, above all, the fact that there is no music ; his clients would resent the vulgar and unseemly noises which delight the *hoi polloi*. Of course Boulestin's is expensive (you cannot dine exquisitely *and* cheaply), but not in any way unreasonable when you consider the quality of the cuisine.

Leoni is another Italian born to the restaurant métier—and he too is an Italian of the best type—a good Italian is hard to beat ; I lived in Italy for years, and I know. He has attracted a very interesting

clientele to his little "*Quo Vadis*" in Dean Street. You may see Miss Doble lunching between shows, Evelyn Laye, Lady Eleanor Smith, Edward Craig, Lord Richard Nevill, and any number of the intelligentzia, especially the younger ones; and I have even seen Church dignitaries lunching there, and doing themselves very well too. The cooking is admirable, and you can get all sorts of Italian specialities—including those of "*Il Papagallo*" of Bologna, which has the best cooking in Italy. Try the *côtelettes de veau Yolanda*, and the delicious orange-ice of Leoni's own invention. Also the new liqueur, Arum.

Leoni's is the only place in London where you can eat the delicious "green spaghetti" or *Fettucciore* which is the speciality of Alfredo's famous little restaurant in Rome. Leoni went to Rome in order to persuade Alfredo to give it to him. While there, his old friend, that very important person Generale Lorenzo, chief of the *Corpo di Armata*, presented him to *Il Duce*.

He has done young artists many a good turn. I believe it was Edward Craig's idea to make the walls of the two rooms a permanent and ever-changing exhibition of modern art—chiefly the works of the younger men. Over two hundred pictures have been sold already.

It is, I am sure, needless to tell my intelligent

readers that to drink cocktails before a meal renders the palate incapable of appreciating the savour of delicate food and wine. A glass of really good sherry, however, stimulates it and sets the gastric juices at work. What an infinity of experience and loving care has been lavished in order to produce a fine sherry ! A young friend, Lawrence Venn, recently sent me a little book he has written about the famous old firm Gonzalez Byass and its interesting and romantic history. It reads like a story of old Spain, which, indeed, it is. After nearly a hundred and fifty years, Gonzalez is still a name to conjure with among sherry experts.

There has been some improvement in the cooking and, more especially, in the way meals are *served* in English hotels and restaurants during the last few years—not in the best London restaurants, which have always been beyond reproach, but in the less expensive ones and in the country. There is more variety in the bills of fare, fruit is becoming popular, they are brighter and cleaner, and there are generally flowers on the tables. All this is largely due to Lyons, who may be said to have *invented* the popular restaurant. Here is the menu of one of their three-and-sixpenny dinners. I have never eaten one of them, but it reads like a dinner at the Carlton or Savoy, and you eat it in a cheerful atmosphere to the accompaniment of a band as good—or bad—as any other restaurant band.

TONIGHT'S MENU

Les Huitres sur Glace.
Hors d'œuvres de l'Empire.

Saumon Fumé.
Feuilleté d'Alsace.
Caviar de Severuga.
Grape Fruit Alicante.

Consommé Polonais.
Crème Dubarry.

Délices de Sole Olga.
Rouget Livournaise.

Ris de Veau en Cocotte Fermière.
Noisettes d'Agneau Mentonnaise.
Pommes Nanette.

Poulet de Surrey Roti en Broche.
Salade Cœur de Laitues.

Coupe de Banane Glacée à l'Esquimaude.
Désirs de Dames.

Music during meals is not, as many people suppose, a modern innovation. In Tudor times and even earlier there was a musicians' gallery in every great house and the musicians attached to the household entertained the company with madrigals and catches. The horrible jazz bands at restaurants which were once first-class, however, are distinctly post-War abominations. The very young and the *nouveaux riches*, neither of whom are sufficiently civilized to appreciate good food, like them, and they serve, at any rate, to distract attention from the mediocrity of the cooking ! Music, properly used, would even now

be delightful during meals. Think how pleasant it would be to lean back in one's chair *between* the courses of an exquisite dinner and listen to the Temple choir singing madrigals by Monteverde and Orlando Gibbons !

Although the best French cooking is still the best in the world, France has done as much harm to the art of cookery as has the late Renaissance to the art of painting, or nineteenth-century German music to that of composition. It has caused the cooks of other countries to forget their excellent national dishes and to waste their energies serving up bad imitations of French menus. In the average hotel all over the world you now eat the same indifferent dinner *à la Française*.

In England we suffer badly from this obsession. And yet the raw material of food *chez nous* is unsurpassed. There are, too, many English dishes half forgotten, of which a few can still be eaten in certain country districts, but our cooks are too lazy and incompetent even to learn their names, to say nothing of learning how to prepare them. They go on making a tepid fluid they call soup, out of cubes they buy in packets and which, whatever be the name by which they are called, all taste exactly alike. They serve up bottled asparagus, tongues, shrimps, and even in the fruit season I have known them make fruit salads from bottled fruits. And, abomination of desolation, they

give you a so-called coffee made out of some filthy concoction they purchase in tins.

Modern advertising has done much to debase the art of preparing food properly, especially among the class that in less democratic days was called the lower middle class. Think of the devastating moral influence those specious advertisements of the young newly married wife putting the whole Sunday dinner in the gas-oven to cook itself, and then going off to church (?), or to play golf, must have on the average woman of small means who reads them ! She goes and does likewise, and gradually her menfolk lose the ability to know good cooking from bad ; their palates become totally insensitive to the finer flavours of food. She herself probably never possessed a palate—few women do. And, again, there is the picture of the unexpected guest rubbing his hands with joy and congratulating his hostess on the meal he is eating, while she, poor dear, tells him, triumphantly, that it all came out of tins.

Well, *autres temps autres mœurs*. I was brought up before the Deluge, and fortunately Fate has been kind, and even in these dark days has delivered me from all women labouring with tins and putting shillings in gas-ovens. Not that I am faddy. All I ask is simple food of the best quality, perfectly prepared with the best materials, and a little good wine to make glad my heart.

Perhaps after all it is better not to be too fond of food ; even if one's digestion remains unimpaired—which is rare—eating makes one fat. I often envy the spare figures and glowing health of young navvies working on the roads, as they eat with contentment their horrible meals. We are told not to set our affections on “things below”, but how can one obey such a counsel while kitchens are in the basement ?

I recently wrote an introduction to Mrs. Brook-Jackson's admirable little book on popular catering,* and was amused to find myself standing sponsor for the excellent refreshments she is able to provide for parish functions at such incredibly low cost. I learnt, to my amazement, that five hundred people could be given tea, coffee, or lemonade, cakes, and sandwiches, at fourpence a head ; that quite elaborate teas with ices, cream buns, and cakes cost only tenpence ; and that it was possible to give an excellent lunch for one-and-sixpence. I shall not show the book to Quaglino !

One of the most melancholy features of domestic life nowadays is the disappearance of the grill, and even of the humble but useful Dutch oven. O for a new poet to sing the praises of succulent sirloins roasted on the spit, and soles really grilled. A Savanarola to raise a clarion call to cooks ! Such a Savanarola

* *Popular Catering Without Waste.* By Christian Brook-Jackson. (Price 1s. Pearson, Ltd.)

would deserve better of his fellow men than did the bigoted Florentine monk who spent so much of his life making himself obnoxious to Lorenzo de Medici—one of the most civilized men of a highly civilized age—and who ended by himself serving as a practical demonstration of the proper use of the grill ! Failing a poet or a monk, the *Daily Mail* might take the matter up.

And now for my second reason for running up to London—the Temple Church. I came to eat and remained to pray !

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CHAPTER XVIII

ON DRINK AND OTHER THINGS

I often wonder what the vintners buy
One half so precious as the thing they sell,

said Omar. What indeed ? One may well ask. No gift of the gods has been the cause of so much happiness as wine when properly used.

Beer is all very well in its way ; it goes admirably with beef, hot or cold, and with all the coarser foods. If you are very thirsty after a long country walk, there is nothing better than a tankard of cool, bitter ale. Oscar Wilde once, when asked at a *table d'hôte* if he would like some cod, refused politely. "It is very good today, sir," said the waiter. "Not to eat, I think," replied Oscar, "but it is no doubt excellent for the purpose of swimming." So it is with beer. It is excellent for the purpose of quenching thirst, but not as an accompaniment to a really first-class cuisine. What right-minded person would drink beer with a young grouse, or stout with oysters ?

An exquisite vintage is a work of art ; it must be

handled with all the consideration with which one handles a fourteenth-century missal, savoured lovingly and lingered over. Never trust a man who will carelessly pour himself out a glass of vintage claret and gulp it down as if it were water or some equally unpleasant drink. He is "fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils" !

The wines of Bordeaux have—through some inexplicable caprice of fashion—been rather out of favour for the last few years. This has been a tragedy for the intelligent diner-out, for a good claret, as we call it, is an exquisite wine and probably one of the most health-giving things in existence. Where do you see such happy, healthy, contented people as the population of the wine country round Bordeaux, unless, perhaps, in the Dijon district? Happily—I have it on no less authority than that of the famous gourmet and wine expert M. André Simon—there is a growing movement in favour of claret-drinking, sponsored by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, who is seriously concerned at the bad effect the cocktail habit is having on the rising generation.

André Simon and I were recently asked to lunch in the "crypt" at Fortnum and Mason's. Before lunch I was taken over the wonderful cellars, where—lovingly tended by their nurses, the cellar men—I saw lying in their cradles, or delicately poised in their bins, all the rare vintage wines and old liqueurs I have ever

dreamed of and been unable to afford. Like the Queen of Sheba, I had no heart left in me—at least, not until I discovered that this was going to be the lunch of my life !

The “Smith of Smiths”—Sidney Smith—wrote over a hundred years ago : “I would combat to the death for Fortnum and Mason’s.”

What would he say nowadays, when modern transit facilities bring them daily the gastronomic delicacies of the whole world !

André Simon is, by the way, the founder of the Wine and Food Society, whose object is to raise the standard of eating and drinking throughout the country. Heaven knows how badly it needs raising ! The society ought to be called The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, only there is already, I believe, a society of that name. The society’s quarterly review, *Wine and Food*, is, apart from its fascinating *raison d’être*, a most interesting magazine. The subject seems to bring the best out of its distinguished contributors, among whom are G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, A. J. Symonds, Alec Waugh, and M. Simon himself.

It is a significant fact that history does not record a single writer, poet, painter, or musician of supreme genius who was a teetotaller. Perhaps the fact that Bernard Shaw is one, besides being a vegetarian, accounts for the depressing aridity which mars so

much of even his best work. The Roman Catholic Church, with its long experience and profound knowledge of humanity, has never encouraged temperance cranks; indeed, when a few years ago a high dignitary of that Church took the chair at a meeting in favour of prohibition, he was sharply brought to heel by the Vatican.

It is that sympathy and understanding of human nature which in the golden days before the War made Roman Catholic countries so pleasant to live in. There was none of that smug hypocrisy and cheap Sunday-school morality with which we are troubled in England. Nor were there the irritating restrictions and regulations which we allow our idiotic legislators to impose on us. One was not told when one might eat and drink, buy cigarettes or chocolate, or do this, that, or the other. In England the influence of that unpleasant person Oliver Cromwell and his dreary Roundheads is still very much alive. The Puritan spirit, now known as the Nonconformist Conscience has always been a deadly enemy of the humanities. It hates and fears nearly all the kindly and gracious fruits of civilization—art, music, poetry, the stage, wine, love-making—that help us to forget the terrible rapidity with which our phantom caravan is journeying towards “the nothing it set out from”.

France—especially the provincial *French* France—is still delightful, but Mussolini and his Fascists have

ruined Italy. Its careless pre-War charm has, I fear, vanished for ever. Stern efficiency and military method have banished it. Why, the last time I was in Florence I should have been fined ten *lire* for walking on the wrong side of the Vigna Nuova had I not happened to know the *guadia* on duty—a touch of the old Florence, that—*Et tu, Firenze!*

Apropos of Fascist Italy, there is an amusing story told of our own would-be dictator Sir Oswald Mosley. At a recent Fascist meeting, when rising to speak he raised his arm in the Fascist salute, whereupon a youthful voice from the back of the hall called out amiably: "Yes, Master Mosley, you may leave the room!"

I never cared much for Italian food and wine. There is not a wine in Italy, red or white, which can for a moment be compared with the good vintages of Bordeaux or Burgundy. Italian beer is very poor stuff, and as for Italian liqueurs, well . . . ! I once gave a friend who was visiting Italy for the first time, and who was lunching with me, a *certosa* (Italian chartreuse) with his coffee. "It tastes rather like drains to me," he said. "But I suppose the Italians like it. *À chacun son gout.*" "What you really mean," said I, "is *à chacun son égout.*"

But although in Italy the methods of producing wine have not been brought to the perfection they have reached in France, there are many very pleasant

Italian wines, chiefly regional. Some of the white wines of the north are quite excellent and the best chianti is agreeable enough as is also the light wine of the Castelli district round Rome; but always ask for *vino di Castelli aperto*—that is in the cask; it does not bottle well. There is, too, a quite good, though rather strong, wine of the Chablis type made in Sicily, called *Corvo Salaparuta*.

Motoring in almost any wine-growing country is more pleasant than it is in England. We have splendid roads, lovely villages, and lovely scenery, but most of our hotels are beneath contempt. In some places they have improved lately; I know a few—a very few—which are thoroughly comfortable and give you good food, but in most of them you eat horribly and are practically forced to drink either beer or whisky. The prices charged for wine are almost prohibitive and the wine-list rarely condescends to give you any information about the Médoc, St. Emilion, Sauterne, or Beaune offered you. It generally “stars” that loathly liquid called Australian burgundy, which tastes to me like a mixture of iron tonic and ink.

The knowledge and appreciation of fine wine is gradually getting less and less; perhaps because it is too expensive; perhaps—and in all probability—because the present age is too hurried. People eat and drink in a hurry, and jump up from table to dance or rush off to some entertainment. Wilde once

said : "I have often noticed that alcohol taken in sufficient quantity produces all the effects of intoxication !" I am afraid it is the wish to experience those effects that make so many of the young people of today drink too much. At a cocktail party I attended recently, a boy I know said to the girl he had brought with him : "I'm just about blotto. I've had eleven drinks. Do you think you can drive home ?" "O.K. I've only had eight," she answered. "You'd better have another to make it the dozen and we'll buzz off."

Talking of cocktails, I wonder why we never have the delicious mint juleps one gets in America, or the Sloe Gin Ricky which inspired an exquisite lyric—I forget who wrote it, but it sounds rather like Ezra Pound. It runs :

Oh, take me to that happy land where the river of booze is
found,
Sloe Gin Rickys a-hangin' on the trees and highballs a-rollin' on
the ground.

What ! highballs a-rollin' on the ground ?

Yes ! highballs are rollin' on the ground.*

It is curious how variously drink affects people. One of the most kindly and courteous men I have ever known was wont on the rare occasions when he had filled too high the cup with Samian wine, to insult his friends right and left and to tell them with ex-

* "Scotch highball" is American for whisky-and-soda.

ceeding frankness what he thought of their characters and their ancestors. More often, of course, drink induces benevolence ; I have known most disagreeable people become quite human after a few whiskies. I wonder how much money would be subscribed at big charity dinners if the guests were given ginger ale instead of champagne ?

I was once staying with the late Mrs. William Vanneck—the mother of the present Lord Huntingfield—and she had just engaged a new butler who looked exactly like an archbishop ought to look and very seldom does.

“At last I can have people to dinner and know that everything will go all right,” said Mrs. Vanneck, and the county was bidden. Everything *did* go fairly well for a time. Soup and fish were served by footman and parlourmaid but our wine-glasses remained empty. “Champagne, Fisher,” our hostess said, looking anxiously at the butler, who was leaning against the sideboard with a fixed smile on his dignified countenance. “Bless her little heart, she shall have a drink,” he answered, making his unsteady way across the dining-room.

Many people become argumentative whenever a little “on”. One friend of mine can put away an amazing amount of drink without any apparent effect, but directly he begins to talk about religion I know that the end is near.

But devastating as the effect of drink can be, I have, after reading recently a book by Cyril Scott, come to the conclusion that music is far more deadly. Mr. Scott tells us that the characteristics of every nation are determined by their music. I had always imagined that it was the other way about. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire appears to have been due to the decadence of its musicians, or rather to the decay of the moral qualities of their music—a point of view which seems to have escaped Gibbon, though Cicero and Juvenal had noted it. Handel was responsible for the Victorian age, and it is sad to realize that so delightful a form of art as the Russian Ballet prepared the way for the present state of affairs in that uncomfortable country.

“All music”, says Mr. Scott, “is inspired by the ‘Devas’, a graded hierarchy of incorporeal Beings ranging from the smallest nature spirit to the loftiest Archangel.” Their musical taste, we are told, runs in the rather deplorable direction of Scriabin and Cæsar Franck. They also directly inspired Mr. Scott’s book ; indeed, they ordered him to write it. They use music, it seems, “to fulfil their inscrutable plans ; for mankind’s upward progress”. Discord is drawing to a close, and in a few years Scriabin and Cæsar Franck will reign unchallenged. The “Shining Ones” also recommend the music of Roger Quilter, which inspires sympathy and love of the beauties of nature.

Although the casual reader will perhaps smile at Mr. Scott and his "Devas", he is not the first to attribute supreme importance to music as a social force. He can quote Plato and Aristotle to support his opinions. The whole subject is a fascinating one. Why does not Ernest Newman devote his great knowledge and his declining years to a study of the influence of music on politics and character throughout the ages? It would be far more interesting than the eternal Wagner, his love affairs, his dishonesty, and his cheap philosophy. Newman's rather spiteful *Life of Liszt*, by the way, has almost succeeded in making that composer a popular favourite!

My friend Reginald Capell, the brilliant and sympathetic critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, shares Newman's love for Wagner, but with him it is not an obsession and he is more catholic in his tastes.

The occult has a curious attraction for many people. Personally I am incapable of realizing the existence of the supernatural, though I am more than willing to admit that life itself is so miraculous that anything may be possible. I have twice slept in so-called haunted rooms—rooms in which people I know of undoubted good faith have been utterly unable to rest—and nothing whatever happened to me. On one of the two occasions the *mise en scène* was peculiarly appropriate. An ancient manor house, panelled rooms lighted by candles, a dying fire, and a

tree outside the window which kept rapping against the panes. I took *Dracula* to read in bed, and fell asleep reading it. But no black agent of the night bid me "sleep no more".

Why is it, by the way, that at spiritualistic séances mediums seem able to invoke only the shades of the lower middle classes? Perhaps life in the next world is as comfortable for the fortunate classes as it is in this, and they are quite contented to "stay put".

To return to the influence of music, there is another composer to whom it has hidden meaning—Mr. Rutland Boughton, who wrote the *Immortal Hour*, the one really musical and imaginative English opera since Purcell. To him "The Ring" typifies the struggle between the Proletariat—with a capital P—and the wicked capitalist. Haydn and Mozart were "parasites in the service of the master class", while Bach and Beethoven were at heart Communists. The work which he oddly calls *Le Sacré du Printemps* is "a landmark in the decay of Christian civilization", and that being the case it is a little hard to understand why he is not grateful to Stravinsky for helping him destroy Christianity which he considers to be the root of all evil, instead of abusing him like a pickpocket. Strange, is it not? Perhaps some day I shall come across some modern writer on music to whom it means just what it does to me—simply music.

It is unfortunate that so few really influential

writers take any interest in music. What a lot Sidney Dark—whose clever editing has done so much to make the *Church Times* the popular paper it now is—could do to reform church music if he chose to take the task in hand. Dark, who knows all there is to know about journalism, is an amusing personality, and an excellent linguist. He was a great friend of Beerbohm Tree and tells some amusing stories about him. In the days of his youth, being temporarily “broke”, he once asked Tree to lend him £20. “My dear boy, I haven’t got £20,” said Tree, in his strange, attractive voice. “Nonsense!” said Sidney. “And you owning His Majesty’s Theatre!” “Come with me,” replied Tree, and taking his arm led him to his bank, which was close by in Piccadilly. “If I write a cheque for £20 for this gentleman, would you cash it?” Tree asked the cashier. “I’m afraid not, Sir Herbert,” was the answer. “There, you see how it is, my boy,” said Tree. “Now let’s go and have lunch at the Carlton.”

Tree had the rare faculty of being able to laugh at himself. The famous story of his Hamlet being “very funny and not at all vulgar” which is attributed to Gilbert, was Tree’s own invention; he himself put it into the mouth of Gilbert, who doubtless wished he *had* said it.

Sidney Dark’s talent is by no means confined to theology, though he has written several books on

religious matters. He is well up in political affairs, and was one of the most successful of the journalists who attended the Peace Conference. He tells an amusing story about the matter-of-factness of the ordinary French official. With a well-known French diplomat he was travelling back to Paris during the Conference, and the *commissaire spécial* on the boat proceeded to ask the usual questions. When he had written the name of the diplomat and his profession he asked : "*Le nom de votre père, s'il vous plaît ?*" "*Je ne le connais pas,*" was the answer. "*Mais monsieur ne connaît pas le nom de son père ?*" "*Non, j'étais un enfant trouvé.*" "*Alors ; monsieur se dit 'enfant trouvé'.* *Merci,*" said the *commissaire*, carefully filling up the form.

Dark came a good deal into contact with the American General Dawes, the Dawes Plan man. He was rather a tiresome sententious person and given to a boasting about the bravery of his fellow countrymen who "won the War". After dinner he invariably waved the star-spangled banner and announced to the world in general : "Yes, *sir*, our boys struck a blow for freedom at Château Thierry." "Can't someone stop him?" said Dark one evening when Dawes began to show the usual symptoms. "Château Hell you mean," said a young English officer (Bertie Davidson) who was present, which so offended Dawes that he stalked out of the room.

During the recent slump, when banks were toppling like ninepins in America, Dawes, who had resigned his post as Ambassador in London in order to return to Chicago, where his bank was in a desperate position, went to the Treasury and demanded a loan of \$85,000,000. On being told that the Treasury might perhaps manage \$10,000,000, he said: "This is Monday. If you refuse me the whole amount, my bank, the Chicago Bank, will close its doors tomorrow, and by Thursday every bank in the Middle West will also have done so." He got his \$85,000,000 and three quarters of it have now been repaid to the Treasury.

Dark was one of that group of clever and amusing men who some twenty-five years ago were always to be found at the Café Royal between six and eight. It included Lord Alfred Douglas, Mostyn Piggott, Bertie Davidson, Hermann Finck, and Cotsford Dick. Poor Dickie who was as bald as a billiard-ball lived happily for many years in a state of complete impecuniosity. Once when he was staying with friends at Monte Carlo he had a sudden inspiration, but, alas, no money. Nothing daunted, he tore off his elegant flaxen wig and threw it on the number he fancied, shouting: "*En plein!*"

CHAPTER XIX

AFTERTHOUGHTS (MARCH 1935)

(A little less optimistic)

They came and were and are not
And come no more anew ;
And all the years and seasons
That ever can ensue
Must now be worse and few.

—A. E. Houseman.

WELL, I have now been back in London nearly six months seeking my fortune like an elderly Dick Whittington. Sometimes I am inclined to wonder why one strives so frantically, seeing the apparent futility of all one's efforts and how soon comes the inevitable end. Even in the short space of two and a half years for some of my best friends "the rest is silence".

Chief among these is that great artist and delightful companion Nigel Playfair, who went at what I now begin to call the *early* age of sixty. Cultured, kindly and serene he went his way, unafraid of life or death. The lovely house in Chiswick Mall on which he lavished so much skill and money, and where one

met everybody connected with the arts who counts, is sold. Fortunately his charming wife still lives in London, trying—cheerful pessimist as she is—to make the best of this “dreary owlin’ dessit”. Like so many others she has joined the ranks of the workers and is acting as an agent for plays. As she is in intimate touch with all the best managers and producers, her agency will be a godsend to the dramatist. She has had a vast experience.

Then there is Alfred Kalisch, one of the finest musical critics in London or anywhere else, and who, unlike most critics, had not one enemy in the world. I once heard him described by one of the innumerable people he had befriended—for no one went to him for help in vain—as “a little Jewish angel”. We had been friends for nearly forty years. Others whom I miss greatly are Eustace Blois, who directed the fortunes of Covent Garden so successfully before it became merely a home for lost Wagnerites ; and Percy Pitt, who had been connected with it for so many years.

But most tragic of all was the accident which killed poor Nadja Malacrida. What a delightful creature she was ! Pretty, artistic, witty, and gay, and endowed with the rare gift of friendship. Perhaps she was fortunate. She had been very happy all her short life. “If it be now, ’tis not to come . . . if it be not now, yet it will come.” . . . So “what is’t to leave betimes ?”

Her husband, the ever young Peter, has just published their love letters to each other. She had always kept them, feeling that they might be worked up into a book, and a delightful book they make.

I met recently at a country house where I was spending the week-end a famous Austrian physician and psycho-analyst—an extraordinarily attractive personality, brilliantly clever, broadminded and cultured. We were talking about the horrors of old age, and he said he thought that when a man was over sixty and could say that on the whole he had enjoyed his life, he could not do better than make a graceful exit while his physical and mental powers remained unimpaired and the evil days were still but the “rumble of a distant drum”.

Perhaps he is right ; there is a lot to be said in favour of lethal chambers for the old. It is only in modern times that such an exaggerated importance has come to be attached to human life. The ancient Greeks and the Romans counted it but a small thing. Half the troubles from which the world is suffering are due to over-population. Sydney Smith—the greatest Smith in Smithendom—said a hundred years ago in reference to the problem of unemployment : “There are too many human beings on the earth ; every two men ought to kill a third.” What would he say today ?

A delightful house where I was always welcomed

—the Master's House, Temple—I now, alas, know no more, for Dr. Carpenter has become Dean of Exeter, where he has an even more fascinating house—a mediæval abode with a great hall, minstrels' gallery, and other beautiful features. Anne Boleyn lay there one night on her way to London, and William of Orange and George II also visited it. So have I ! I stayed there for Dr. Carpenter's installation as Dean ; a most interesting ceremony. The Chapter had ransacked the records in order to make it correct in every detail. The procession was headed by a "Virger bearing the dog-whipper's Virge". It was probably necessary in the Middle Ages when churches were used for other purposes besides that of worship. When the bishops and canons were massed before the golden High Altar, decked with flowers and blazing with lighted candles, the effect was extraordinarily beautiful. And what a setting for it all !

The Dean has a dry humour of which those who know him only slightly do not suspect him. On one occasion I was telling him about a rather trying person with whom I was associated in some work, and said : "I have tried to be tactful, but it is quite useless. I am afraid I shall soon be very rude to him." "Oh, don't be rude, Percy," he answered, "*just be yourself !*"

On another occasion we were speaking of a certain prelate who has no small opinion of the dignity of his position. "He thinks," said the Dean, "that it is good

for the lower orders in the cathedral city that there should be *some* person whom they should address humbly as 'My Lord', and he is convinced that Providence has shown its wisdom in making *him* that person."

There are two other houses I can no longer frequent, for I regret to say their owners have made the sad discovery that the marriage tie is only a slip-knot. Of one of these couples "I could a tale unfold", but I will refrain, for the pen, though perhaps mightier than the sword, is certainly far more dangerous.

There is one great advantage in living in London, and that is that although, as the old song says, "friend after friend departs", the arrivals are almost as frequent. One is constantly making new ones. One of the most delightful people I have met in recent years is Miss "Dot" Mackenzie, who is the fortunate owner of a charming house in that charming street, Charles Street. It is full of lovely things, including two portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds—the famous Mrs. Treeby, and Sir Samuel Barrington; a perfect Raeburn; one of Cosway's rare portraits—the Duchess of Devonshire, and Hopner's "Lady Hester Stanhope". She has, too, a fine collection of miniatures and some wonderful old English furniture, all of which the admirable Charles—her butler—cares for like a father. To dine in her panelled, candle-lighted dining-room gives me the illusion of being back in the eighteenth

century. Miss Mackenzie is a most interesting companion and a splendid friend—if she likes you !

By the way, 14 Charles Street rejoices in an authentic eighteenth century ghost. Soon after Charles entered Miss Mackenzie's service he had just gone up to bed one night when there were three knocks on his door. "Come in," he said. *There was no answer.* A few minutes afterwards the knocks were repeated, so he got out of bed and opened the door. *There was no one there.* He locked the door, got back into bed and was nearly asleep when there were again three knocks, and this time the locked door opened and a tall lady entered the room, walked to the dressing-table and began eagerly searching for something. He could see her plainly as it was a moonlight night and the curtains were not drawn. She then walked to his bedside, bent over him, sighed deeply, and disappeared, leaving him speechless with fright. On being told next morning that he had seen the ghost, he was reassured. "A ghost can't hurt anyone," said Charles. "Faith, 'tis an honest ghost !"

Another night when he was going upstairs to bed, he heard voices and movements in the dining-room, of which he had just locked the door. He went back, searched the room—which was, of course, empty—and again locked *and* bolted the door. He was half-way upstairs when the door opened slowly ! Miss

Mackenzie herself has heard sounds as if a harpsichord was being played in the drawing-room. There is not a musical instrument of any kind in the house.

At Miss Mackenzie's house I recently met Lady White-Thompson, a politically-minded woman who gives most pleasant evening parties. A little talk on some political question and then supper. She always contrives to get amusing people. At one of them a young German diplomat told me an excellent story about Dr. Goebels, the Minister of Propaganda. He went one evening to a Berlin restaurant and called loudly for a "Hitler herring". The waiter had never heard of the dish, and when he ventured to say so was loudly abused for his ignorance, and told to go to the chef and learn his business.

The trembling youth did so. "That's all right," said the chef; "he shall have it," and in due course the dish was given him to set before his redoubtable client.

Goebels ate it, and calling the waiter, bellowed his approval, saying, "That's the best 'Hitler herring' I have ever eaten. Tell the chef that I shall send all my friends here."

"What did you give him?" the intrigued waiter asked the chef. "Oh," he answered, "just an ordinary 'Bismarck herring' with the *brains* and the *backbone removed*."

Another story concerned General Goering, an

exceedingly vain man who is inordinately proud of his decorations, which he wears in season and out of season. On one occasion he was getting ready to attend a public function and could not find his French order *Pour la Mérite*. There was a frantic search for it, and at last, when the whole apartment had been turned upside down and everyone was in despair, he suddenly remembered and exclaimed : "Oh, of course, I left it on my pyjama jacket !"

A curious race, the Germans. I have known a good many, and am convinced that their truculence and bad international manners come from shyness and a sense of inferiority *vis-à-vis* of the more civilized nations. It simmers and rankles, so they swagger and shout to reassure themselves. They love standing on their dignity, but in their hearts they know that they are on very insecure ground.

A year or two ago, at the house of the Master of the Temple—now Dean of Exeter—I had the pleasure of meeting that great bishop and great gentleman, the Bishop of London, who honoured me by allowing me to write a sketch of his life. It was a labour of love. At Hawkhurst—an enchanting village—where I retired to write it, I met Lord and Lady Goschen, to whose kind offices Lord Richard Nevill had commended me. Also Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt, of War fame. He is a typical sailor, simple and friendly. I fell in love with his cat "George", who follows him

everywhere like a dog—and hunts, too. At Sandhurst, three miles from Hawkhurst, lives that great and kind doctor Victor Nesfield, to whose skill I owe much. He is worshipped by the poor, whom he loves and understands.

To go from the Church to the Stage—an easy transition nowadays—I have recently had great pleasure in the society of young John Gielgud. He too is as modest as he is talented, and he has all the “Terry” charm and good manners. No wonder he played Hamlet well—he is Hamlet! We once talked over the character, and he told me how hard he tried to make Hamlet as manly as possible. But Hamlet was not a normal youth. What young “hearty” was ever so introspective and so given to speculating on the eternal problems of life and conduct? Gielgud’s death scene was the most beautiful thing I have ever witnessed on the stage. I could not speak after the curtain fell—a rare experience with me!

One has not seen so many Americans about since the great slump in God’s own country. Perhaps it is good for them that they have been afflicted. They had grown so inflated with prosperity that they were asking for trouble, and trouble never refuses an invitation. “America,” said some wit, “is the only country that has achieved the distinction of becoming decadent before it has become civilized.”

Peter Malacrida told me a characteristic story of

two rich American sisters who live in London and who wanted their portraits painted. They thought Laszlo more fashionable because of his being so popular with the Royal Family, but they rather preferred Lavery. So they commissioned portraits from both painters !

Peter also told me of an amusing experience a bachelor friend of his had last summer. He was staying at a country house and fell in love with "Mary", an old mare, aged eighteen years and a Grand National celebrity. In writing his "bread-and-butter" letter, he said : *I have lost my heart to Mary ; she is the best mount I ever had.* Now, one of his fellow guests was a lady somewhat past her first youth, who would not have minded being led to the altar by the bachelor in question. Her name, too, was Mary. Their hostess, a cousin of the lady, thought that *she* was the Mary he meant, and wrote him an enthusiastic letter offering to bring them together !

It was Peter who introduced me to Lord Queenborough, whose kindly hospitality at his delightful country house, Camfield Place, Hatfield, has so helped to make life agreeable for me. Lord Queenborough—so well known as Mr. Almeric Paget before he was elevated to the peerage—has had an extraordinarily interesting career. As the younger son of a younger son he lived an adventurous life in the Middle West. After his marriage to Miss Pauline Whitney he made a considerable name in politics.

He is a keen sportsman and also a man of affairs. Had he devoted himself wholly to public life he would undoubtedly have been one of our greatest administrators. He would have been the ideal choice as Governor-General of Canada.

Although I have spoken about the desirability of lethal chambers for the old, I am beginning to doubt the ability of the young to change the face of the world. I once hoped that a new and golden age was dawning ; that the wicked old diplomatists and politicians would soon be swept from the face of the earth, and that youth—earnest, wise, and humanitarian youth—would be at the helm, and that this poverty-stricken, war-weary planet would blossom like the rose. And look at 'em ! Everywhere that they have got the upper hand they have become aggressive, military, intolerant, and idiotic. The truth is, youth is too violent. After all, Anatole France was right. He loved humanity, but he had no great faith in its progress. He knew that man is, as he has always been, uncivilized, stupid, selfish, vain and intolerant, and that when he gets a little authority over his fellow men he is sure to abuse it. Especially in the early stages. A Government that has been in power for a long time becomes more mellow, or, rather, more indolent, which amounts to much the same thing. New brooms sweep clean, but they are apt to rasp.

The post-War brooms—while inefficient as regards their cleansing properties—have certainly spoilt some of what were once the pleasantest places in Europe for those of us who used to love “going abroad”. I suppose Mussolini was very useful to his country at the time when he first loomed on the horizon. Italy was seething with anarchy and he certainly restored order. But if he had been successfully assassinated about 1928, I think it would have been better for everyone. And the same may be said about Hitler and his fanatical followers.

Still, even in 1935 it is good to be young, quite sure that we know it all, and intolerant. The young of today in Italy and Germany will be able to look back on exciting times when that thief, Time, “who takes in trust our youth, our joys, our all we have”, is bringing the story of their days to an end.

Why is it, I wonder, that when wistful memories of some moment in the past when we were poignantly conscious of being radiantly happy, flash into our minds, they are never of our most worthy actions or our material successes? “At least I’m sure it may be so in Denmark”! Rather are they memories of some small, boyish triumph; of a violet-scented morning in early spring when for some foolish reason the world seemed an enchanted place—drenched with sunshine, song, and happiness—or of an unexpected sum of money which came from the blue and our

joyous plans for spending it improperly. Strange how unreal those memories seem !

When I look back at my early childhood it seems as if I were looking at something quite outside myself ; something which concerns me no more than does a story read long ago and dimly remembered—less, indeed. Events in history that have interested me deeply, famous characters in books and plays, seem to me infinitely more real than does the little boy in the Eton jacket whose portrait I still possess—a plain child !—and of whose life I can recall only a number of detached incidents. I can easily believe that Hamlet lived and can endow him with an imaginary boyhood. As the curtain falls on the various scenes that have for a moment held the stage in our lives, as the characters die and the *milieu* changes, they cease, I think, to have any concrete meaning and go to join the dream people.

I had a curious experience a few days ago. I was waiting in Kensington High Street to catch my No. 9 bus, when a small and somewhat uncleanly little boy of about eleven with fair hair and big blue eyes looked me over carefully, as children do, and asked me the time. Have you, by the way, noticed that they never ask the first person passing, but always choose their man ? I told him, and after giving me another scrutiny, he suddenly said : “I was chased by a man just now.” “Why ?” I asked. “Had you been cheeking him ?”

"No, I only shot at him with my airgun," said the child. He went on : "Do you think he was *asleep* when he ran after me?" "What on earth do you mean?" said I. "Well, when I go to sleep I dream I am doing all sorts of things I have seen at the pictures, and I often wonder if I am *really* doing them."

I tried to explain that perhaps his astral body fared forth in quest of nocturnal adventure, leaving his not unattractive little human body safely tucked up in bed, but he was evidently not satisfied. "When I go to the pictures," he continued, "I wonder if all the things and people are real, and then I wonder if I am real, and that makes me enjoy it more," he said dreamily. At that moment up came a No. 9, so I left him.

A few days afterwards I told a famous scientist about him, who said : "The little chap has already got into deep waters. I should like to have met him. What a fool you were not to ask his name and where he lived !"

It is curious, seeing how large a part music has played in my life, that I have been very little to concerts lately. Can one, perhaps, have heard too much music ? Percy Pitt told me a few months before he died that for him it was beginning to become meaningless. I think the wireless has something to do with it. One simply can't escape it, and

To wash and dress and eat and drink
And look at things and talk and think
And work . . .

to music becomes a nuisance. But I like musicians. I met Borovsky when he was in London recently, and he told me an amusing story of Mischa Elman. He and Borovsky were talking to each other at a party, when up came a lady and greeted Elman warmly, saying : "It is ages since I have seen you—not since you were married, I believe." "No," answered Elman; "and I have a little boy, you know. He is just beginning to learn the violin." "Oh !" exclaimed the lady ecstatically. "*Perhaps he will turn out a second Menuhin !*"

Perhaps these afterthoughts are a little less optimistic than the rest of my meanderings, but then they were written after six months of scratching, like an elderly hen, to earn an honest living. And when one is past sixty, high endeavour is rather depressing. Anyway, *che sara, sara*, so let the stricken deer go weep !

CHAPTER XX

MORAL

I WAS well brought up, and I like books to end with a moral. I like the good to be well paid for their goodness and the bad to get it properly in the neck. The Victorian writers never allowed the wicked to flourish like green bay trees beyond a certain point ; they always cleaned up the mess in the last chapter. It is nice to read in *Oliver Twist* that “Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, deprived of their situations, were gradually reduced to great indigence and misery and finally became paupers in the very same workhouse in which they had once lorded it over others”, while the priggish Oliver lived happily ever after.

This passion for probity was instilled into me. When I was yet in the nursery the inimitable *Poems for Infant Minds*, by Jane and Ann Taylor, were my daily food. Thus, I was taught by the terrible fate of young Thomas, who—sad to relate—not only “minded naught but play”, but also “learnt to curse and swear”, that

Wicked courses never can
Bring good and happy days.

In vivid contrast was William, "a good little child", who was rewarded with a wife "and a sweet smiling babe on each knee". Well—I have had the wife !

With every wish in the world to make, like Polonius, a "good end", I am rather at a loss to discover any particular moral to which these trivial pages point unless it be that if you can manage to keep your digestive organs in good order, it is possible to enjoy life very much, even at sixty. If your digestion works properly you will feel good-tempered and amiably disposed towards your fellow-travellers through this vale of tears, and if you are agreeable to them, they will be agreeable to you.

They'll dine you and wine you
And fill you with food,
And all men will love you
Because you are good. Q.E.D.

You may consider that such facile amiability is worthless, that one may smile and smile and be a villain. Very possibly ; but even so, a smiling sinner is better than a sullen saint. Most of us take everything far too seriously ; our affairs, our politics, our morals—even more so the morals of our neighbours—and our unimportant opinions. One should have fixed convictions only on matters which are beyond dispute.

And, after all, what on earth does it matter? As our charlady invariably remarks when she hears of the death of an acquaintance : “Ah, pore thing. Wot I always says is, we’re ’ere today and gone to-morrer.”

When one is growing old it is an excellent thing to cultivate the society of the young ; that is, if they will allow you to do so. There is a poem by Hilaire Belloc in which occur the lines :

And the lads who were boys when I was a boy
Shall walk along with me.

Heavens ! They are the very last people I should care to walk along with. What a procession of bores, bankrupts, and paralytics we should be ! Our bath-chairs would obstruct the traffic. I much prefer the lads who are boys now. In their gay company I can feel that

Still are thy pleasant voices,
Thy nightingales awake.

They are generally entirely reasonable, sweet-tempered, and generous-minded, and far more interesting and intelligent than their elders. They are the material of which the new “World Symphony” will be composed : the Brave New World !

As I said in the beginning—my excellent bringing

up almost caused me to write, "As it *was* in the beginning . . ."—I took up my pen and wrote simply in order to make a little money. One must live, *n'est-ce pas?* Perhaps one of the gentle readers to whom I have referred will cease to be gentle, and give me the devastating answer given by a small niece of Dr. Inge to a gushing lady of whom she did not approve. It was at the Children's Fancy Dress Ball at the Mansion House, and so fairy-like was the little maiden that the lady exclaimed ecstatically: "Oh, you darling! You *must* come to tea with me one day soon." The child looked her up and down, and said coldly: "Why?"

THE END

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